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Bring in the professionals: how pre-parliamentary political experience affects political careers in the House of Commons

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Politics

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signed.....

Peter Allen

Abstract

In this thesis I use original empirical data to examine the impact of the political experience of MPs before they enter parliament on their careers once inside the House of Commons. The contribution I make to knowledge is twofold. First, I build on existing literature in the field by developing a stand-alone classification of pre-parliamentary political experience that distinguishes between experience gained on the local level, for example as a local councillor, and experience gained on the national level, working for an MP or in the head office of a political party. Second, I empirically operationalise this classification and support it adopting quantitative research techniques. Using a cohort study of those MPs first elected at the 1997 general election, I find that those MPs with national-level pre-parliamentary political experience are more likely to reach cabinet-level frontbench positions while MPs with local-level experience are more likely to remain backbenchers or reach only the lower levels of government. I highlight the ways in which national-level pre-parliamentary political experience interacts with other political and personal factors to provide a small group of MPs with a preferential parliamentary career path relative to their colleagues. I conclude by placing my findings in the context of comparative research on political parties, reflecting that certain types of party structure privilege specific types of pre-parliamentary political experience. I also consider the findings in light of debates on political representation and professionalisation, and highlight directions for future research in this area.

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Introduction

One of my criticisms of a lot of politicians of all parties is that they're career politicians. Since they were 11 years old they dreamed of being an MP, being the prime minister, and so they'll do A-Level politics, politics degree, get a job with an MP, work for a thinktank, become an MP, prime minister. And my criticism is what life experiences do you have? The reason most MPs aren't popular is that people can see through that.

(Labour MP Sadiq Khan in Mullinger 2011)

Not everyone likes politics. Of those who do, only a small percentage will have an interest in running for elected political office. Within this group, only a few will take the step of actually running for office and of these electoral candidates, only some are successful. Among the elected, few make it to the top jobs within the legislative body in question. This final distinction, understanding the dynamics between those elected politicians who reach the apex of political life and those who do not, is the focus of this thesis.

Of the many thousands of individuals who have sat on the benches of House of Commons as Members of Parliament (MPs) over the years, precious few are remembered. Only a small minority enter our consciousness as leaders, great or otherwise, and mark themselves out as historical figures of note. These individuals are mostly drawn from the frontbenches, either as Ministers or Secretaries of State, their shadows, or indeed as Leaders of their parties and Prime Ministers of their country. Why is this the case? Why do some MPs reach these roles whilst others do not, and are there systemic patterns visible in this process?

Writing in 2009, Michael Kenny asks 'is there a political elite in Britain today, and through what criteria is this to be gauged?' (2009, p.349). What marks out the successful? In Ancient Rome, individuals running for public office would wear white robes to signify their intention, the Latin word for which is *candide* – making them, in contemporary English, candidates. Modern politicians are not so easily picked out, but this thesis will contend that in many ways, the thing that differentiates the politicians who make it to the top from those who do not is politics itself. More specifically, the way that MPs have interacted with

the political system prior to their election, and gained pre-parliamentary political experience, can help to explain their subsequent political careers.

The personal and social backgrounds of MPs have interested scholars of British politics for decades, resulting in a significant body of work on the subject (Rush 1969; Budge and Farlie 1975; Mellors 1978; King 1983; Kavanagh 1992; Rush 1994; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris and Lovenduski 1997; Best et al. 2001; Jun 2003; Rush and Giddings 2011; Hill 2013). This work has largely focused on the sex, age, education, and occupational background of MPs, and occasionally on parliamentary candidates overall. This fascination with the lives of politicians before they became national-level politicians is not isolated to Britain, with studies covering multiple European countries, the devolved legislatures within the UK, as well as the United States (US), all being present in the literature (Farlie, Budge, and Irwin 1977; Gallagher 1985; Canon 1990; Borchert and Zeiss 2003; Fox and Lawless 2004; Lawless and Fox 2005; Keating and Cairney 2006; Lawless 2012).

Initially, this literature was broadly interested in the ways in which certain groups of society, notably women, ethnic minorities, and those from working-class backgrounds, were less present in political life than men and those individuals from wealthier backgrounds, for example. By the 1990s, studies in this field argued that certain occupations were better suited to pursuing a political career than others, and thus those individuals who held those occupations were more likely to make it into politics, with Paul Cairney later dubbing this the 'politics-facilitating' classification (Rush 1994; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Best et al. 2001; Cairney 2007). This classification was based on the idea that various resources, both monetary, temporal, and political, were required to mount an attempt at election to parliament, and that occupation was one way in which these resources were distributed unequally throughout the population. The classification of these different types of occupation remained largely untouched prior to Cairney's intervention in 2007, which calls for a re-think of the 'politics-facilitating' category (2007). He argues that there are now two types of 'politics-facilitating' occupations; those which are merely conducive to politics, including traditional professional jobs, the law and so on, and those which have a direct link to politics, such as working for an MP or a political party. Cairney terms these brokerage and instrumental occupations, respectively.

The core argument of the thesis

This thesis builds on the literature focusing on political recruitment and political careers in two main ways. Firstly, it argues that conflating political experience with occupational experience obscures the fact that the majority of MPs will have political experience that is not necessarily their primary occupation, usually the thing measured by these classifications. For example, only 14.5% of the 2010 House of Commons had occupational experience classified as 'political' or as a 'political organiser' (Criddle 2010). However, this is highly unlikely to mean that all other MPs had no political experience; rather it is likely that their experience was of a different type, and not their primary occupation. The existing brokerage-instrumental classification belies this, and it is for this reason that I argue political experience should be considered as a stand-alone category, separate from occupation. Within this category, I make a distinction between political experience gained on the national political level, experience analogous to much of the existing instrumental category, such as working for an MP, working in the head office of a political party, for a think-tank, and so on, and experience gained on the local level, as a local councillor, a local party organiser, or just as a local party activist.

The second way in which the thesis contributes to existing scholarship is by developing its scope of analysis. Much of the work detailed above is interested in the backgrounds of MPs because it is perceived to matter who our MPs are, based on a sometimes tacit, sometimes not, assumption that this will affect how they do politics, and that it is potentially undemocratic for political representatives to be largely drawn from the same societal groups (Phillips 1995; Lovenduski 2005). Only in passing is it considered that pre-parliamentary background may well affect political careers beyond the point of getting into parliament, and affect MPs' career path within the legislature itself. For example, Vernon Bogdanor notes the limited number of post-war Prime Ministers with local council experience, and Colin Mellors comments that although the trend of recruiting local councillors to become MPs is strong, and (at the time), growing, these individuals rarely make it into leadership positions (Mellors 1978, pp.98-99; Bogdanor 2009). However, these analyses are not focused specifically on the question of pre-parliamentary political experience and as such, do not address it systematically.

These concerns are developed into three focal research questions; first, does pre-parliamentary political experience affect career trajectory within the UK Parliament?

Second, does local and national pre-parliamentary political experience have the same effect on career trajectory? And third, how would the patterns seen in the UK apply to different types of political system and political party in comparative research?

To answer these questions empirically, I operationalise and apply the stand-alone classification of political experience to original data collected by myself that details the personal, social, occupational, and political backgrounds of those 242 MPs elected to the House of Commons for the first time at the 1997 general election, as well as their post-election careers. Using a harmonised scale of frontbench appointments and quantitative research methods, cross-party analysis is permitted. I find that pre-parliamentary political experience does have an effect on career trajectory in the UK Parliament, and that different types of political experience have different effects. Most notably, I find that those MPs with political experience gained on the national level are more likely than their colleagues with local political experience to be elected at a younger age, gain promotion into springboard offices, and to reach cabinet-level frontbench office. Respectively, these conceptual and empirical contributions to the literature comprise the bulk of original scholarly contribution of the thesis.

Arguably, such findings are of interest in and of themselves, particularly to scholars with an interest in the House of Commons, and perhaps to non-academic political practitioners, particularly those looking to pursue a career in politics – this potential relevance is addressed in greater detail in the concluding chapter of the thesis. It is also arguable that uncovering patterns such as those which this thesis and the existing literature focuses on is a key element the work of political science as a discipline; elucidating political processes and looking beyond the day-to-day workings of political life to chart longer-term trends, or those which are hidden from public view. In this tradition, I contribute to the literature on comparative party politics by examining in chapter six the potential application of the conceptual framework developed for the British case to broader comparative work in future, a further contribution to existing scholarship. Specifically, I ask whether patterns of pre-legislative political experience differ by political system, by political party type, or on an individual-level basis, addressing the third research question above. However, there is additionally another more normative case to be made as to why this research, and its findings, matters.

Why care?

This thesis is about representatives, individuals elected to institutions with a representative function, and the normative case of the importance of this thesis lies within this literature of representation. A concern with political careers and political recruitment more broadly, takes on greater resonance when contextualised within more normative discussions relating to these ideas. To quote Anne Phillips, this section will address the question of ‘why should it matter who our representatives are?’ (1998, p.224).

Representation, at root, is the idea that something is in the place of another, ‘the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact’ (Pitkin 1967, pp.8-9). Saward notes that in political science, the discussion of where, how and when this occurs tends to be situated largely, although not exclusively, within elected legislatures (Saward 2006). Much of the recent existing literature which looks at both the under- and over-representation in political institutions of certain groups focuses on the representation of women, often asking what effect the low numbers of women elected to legislatures across the world has had on the representation of women’s political interests. This debate has occurred broadly along a demarcation of women’s descriptive and substantive representation (Celis and Childs 2008). Jane Mansbridge writes that in descriptive representation, ‘representatives are in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent’ (1999, pp.628-629). This type of representation is also known as mirror or microcosmic representation. The second term to be defined is substantive representation. Joni Lovenduski defines this as simply ‘the representation of [a group’s] interests’ (2005, p.18). Arguably, these concepts can also be used when discussing the representation of any defined group in society, such as the disabled, ethnic minorities, or even men.

Many arguments in favour of increasing women’s representation often relied in the past on the assumption of the existence of a deterministic link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women and that an increase in the former would automatically result in a greater manifestation of the latter, although it has been argued by contemporary gender and politics scholars that this argument, and the research which has been carried out in support of it, is based on a misreading of earlier texts (Childs and Krook 2008, p.730). Critical mass theory, pioneered by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) and developed by Drude Dahlerup (1988) borrows its terminology from nuclear physics ‘where

it refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction' (1988, p.275). Often misconstrued amongst scholars as saying that a specific marker, often given as 30%, would lead to women representatives actively pursuing women's' interests (generally seen to be traditional feminist concerns) through the formation of supportive coalitions, recent re-readings of these seminal works have argued that they actually contained a more nuanced view of the relationship between the number of women present in a legislature and their subsequent behaviour (Childs and Krook 2008). Building on this, conceptions of how the link between the number of members of a group and their impact within a political body have been developed. Karen Celis and Sarah Childs have noted how when talking of the substantive representation of women, at least until relatively recently, feminist scholars would often consider women's interests to be fairly transparent, certainly in areas considered to be naturally gendered in nature such as abortion rights. More recently, the development of this work to include analysis and discussion of women elected to parliament from parties of the right of the political spectrum has problematised this feminist shopping list approach (Celis and Childs 2012). That is, representatives are unlikely to be able to know the desires of a defined extra-parliamentary group to whom they also belong simply because of this fact.

Thus, the argument for presence based on a desire for substantive representation is arguably no longer the core plank of claims for increased women's representation. But how relevant would such an argument ever have been to the situation being examined in this thesis? It is posited in this thesis that there are some politicians who have spent their entire political lives at the national level who are more pre-disposed to successful parliamentary careers based on their pre-parliamentary political experience, more so than their colleagues who lack such experience and instead gained theirs at the local level. However, these individuals are not all white, not all male, not all privately or Oxbridge-educated, and they are not all borne of fantastic familial wealth. As such, the arguments above, rooted as they are in fixed characteristics such as race, sex, class, and so on, are harder to apply here.¹

However, many feminist theorists have thought beyond arguments that were reliant on a link between descriptive and substantive representation, and there are other arguments in the broader literature that can be adapted to address the question of why a concentration

¹ Oxbridge is a portmanteau which refers to the universities of both Oxford and Cambridge.

of political power in the hands of a given group, based on any characteristics, is problematic and something worthy of concern. These arguments are broken into three sections. Firstly, the argument that it is unhealthy based on conceptions of justice, secondly, that it is democratically unhealthy, and thirdly, that it has a negative effect on the functional representation offered by the Commons.

For many feminist writers, the justice argument is the most powerful and irrefutable argument in favour of equal representation along the lines of sex, but again, it is possible to extend the principle to other inequalities of representation (Allen and Dean 2008). To quote Anne Phillips, 'no argument from justice can defend the current state of affairs' (1995, p.65) and the thrust of this argument is straightforward – it is simply not fair, nor right, that women are so grossly underrepresented in parliament relative to their numbers in the overall population. Extrapolating these arguments to the case in hand is possible, within certain limits. For the justice argument to function here, it needs to be inverted to focus on overrepresentation rather than underrepresentation. That is, the problem here is that a given group is dominating powerful positions, not that an equivalent opposite group is underrepresented. In any case, however, the argument stands – it's simply not just for any group to dominate political power (or representation more broadly).

A further argument can be made that such concentration of power is not democratically healthy, in that it will have negative knock-on effects which will affect people's perceptions of how well they are represented by the Commons. Right now, these perceptions would appear to be in bad shape, with only 14% of Britons trusting politicians to be honest, and an academic literature building up around this idea of popular political discontent (Stoker 2006; Hay 2007). This argument, relating to democratic health, requires a consideration of the interaction between representatives and the represented – how do these two groups relate to one another? It also requires an assumption that, at heart, a functioning democracy is an inclusive one. Phillips writes, 'descriptive representation matters because of what it symbolizes to us in terms of citizenship and inclusion – what it conveys to us about who does and does not count as a full member of society' (2012, p.517). Similarly, Jane Mansbridge provides two arguments that can be used to support representative claims that are also not linked to substantive representation. Firstly, she argues that increased descriptive representation will help to create a social meaning of 'ability to rule' for groups who have been underrepresented in the past and who may have had their ability to rule questioned (1999, p.628). Secondly, she argues that increased descriptive

representation will increase the de facto legitimacy of the legislature, particularly where there has been overt discrimination in the past (1999, p.628). These factors focus on the importance of inclusion and belonging in any definition of democracy (Childs 2008, pp.103-104). Might a diversity of representation quite simply be good for politics? Such arguments from difference are based on the idea that women, or other groups, will 'do politics' differently to men (or whoever is dominant) and bring about change in the political system that is beneficial to all (Lovenduski 2005, p.24).

The final strand of the argument being put forward here relates to functionality and skills – the idea that by concentrating political power in the hands of individuals with similar types of pre-parliamentary experience, expertise from elsewhere is being lost at a cost to the workings of the system. Variants of this argument seem to have faded from academic work in recent years, but older writings by authors such as Anthony Birch and Samuel Beer refer to this type of 'functional representation' (Birch 1979, p.109). In his review of both pluralist and guild socialist writings, the two groups Birch identifies as being the main advocates of this type of functional group representation, the clearest outlines of the core principles of this idea come from G.D.H. Cole and another author, writing under a pseudonym, called Candidus (1979, pp.106-110). For these two authors, representation of the individual was 'impossible', with Cole writing that representation 'is always specific and functional', Birch noting that Cole felt it was 'impossible to represent men as men, but possible to represent 'certain purposes common to groups of individuals' (1979, p.109). For the purposes of this thesis, the relative merits of group or individual representation are largely moot, rather the point of citing such work here is to highlight that the idea that occupational groups, notably in industry, having formal representation and power to elect their own MPs, are not so ludicrous as modern political discourse might lead one to believe. That is, revisiting work by Birch and Beer foregrounds the fact that a) many have believed that occupational groups are deserving of formal representation within legislatures and b) that underlying this is an assumption, perhaps tacit, that this is because these groups, and their members, can offer insight and skills unavailable elsewhere.

In order to extrapolate this, as with the arguments from justice presented above, it is necessary to shift the focus from those being excluded to those being included – those who are overrepresented. In this case, this would be a group of politicians, all with similar or the same pre-parliamentary political experience, dominating executive-level positions.

What is being lost, politically, democratically, perhaps even in terms of policy, from this situation? The thoughts of G.D.H. Cole and those who agreed with him would suggest that quite a lot is being lost in terms of expertise, a functional specialism of sorts. Describing functional representation in 1982, Samuel Beer, in an argument that one could now imagine being used in a comment piece railing against professional politicians, writes;

as control [of government] extends into the complex and technical affairs of the economy, governments must win the cooperation of crucial sectors and show sensitivity to their values and purposes. Not least it must elicit their expert advice...In various period of history the contribution of representatives has been thought of sometimes as primarily “reason”, at other times as “will”. For the proponents of functional representation in modern times, this contribution is especially “knowledge” (1982, p.73).

Indeed, it is possible to find reflection of these arguments in modern media portrayals of politics and politicians. Writing in 2010, political commentator Jonathan Isaby asked ‘Does it matter that only three of the 23 Cabinet ministers have been councillors?’ when it transpired that the new coalition cabinet suffered from a distinct lack of local experience (2010). Another, more abstract complaint, seen in a 2008 editorial in *The Telegraph* asserts that ‘politics needs real people’, noting that ‘few senior British politicians have had a life outside politics and they can hardly be said to have made a success of running the country in recent years’ (2008). In their own way, these views are similar to those of Cole and others. They espouse the need for a diversity of experience, occupational and otherwise, and for reasons ranging from the practical, in terms of policy benefits and decision-making, to the more abstract, relating to perceptions of who should be involved in politics. To quote Beer once again, ‘the knowledge of those performing this function may well be necessary for the good governing of the wider community. They have special skills, experience, *expertise* which government must have at hand if it is to understand and control the complex and interdependent social whole’ (1982, p.73).

A crucial point to make here is that this argument stands simply on the basis that there are skills, insights, and so on, that will be gained from, for example, being a local councillor, that will be missing if top parliamentary roles are dominated by those without such experience. There is no attempt here to make any comment about ideological differences,

or about *deserving* representation. That is not to say such arguments could not be made, as they likely could, but they will not be made in this thesis.

Summary of the thesis

The thesis addresses the research questions detailed above over the course of eight chapters, including this one. Chapter one addresses the existing literature in greater detail, moving onto chapter two which lays out a theoretical rationale for the research, asking why pre-parliamentary political experience could be expected to affect post-election career trajectory. Chapter three is the methods chapter of the thesis, outlining the methodological approach of the thesis, as well as introducing the variables which are utilised in the empirical analysis through basic descriptive statistics. Chapters four and five provide the empirical analysis of the thesis, highlighting the contribution to empirical knowledge on political careers that the thesis makes. Chapter six asks whether these patterns would be seen in other countries, and develops the concepts used in the thesis for use in broader comparative studies of political parties before discussing the outcomes which could be expected from such work. The final chapter concludes the thesis, summarising its conclusions and contributions to existing scholarship, highlighting its links to broader scholarly work, prior to offering suggestions for future research in this area. To close this chapter, I summarise the thesis as a whole, chapter by chapter.

Chapter one

I begin by examining the relevant literature in chapter one. This chapter is organised broadly along the lines of what we know about political careers in Britain already and then highlighting gaps in this work. I open by identifying existing trends in political recruitment and the characteristics of MPs highlighted by extant work (Rush 1969; Mellors 1978; Bochel and Denver 1983; Rush 1994; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Best et al. 2001; Rush 2001; Borchert and Zeiss 2003; Jun 2003; Keating and Cairney 2006; Cairney 2007). The House of Commons is shown to be increasingly socially homogenous, with the social extremes of Labour's manual workers and Conservative landed gentry giving way to a largely middle-class group of legislators (Keating and Cairney 2006, pp.43-44), be male-dominated (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Lovenduski 2005; Childs 2008), and to be witnessing a shift from occupations classified as 'brokerage', indicating a job that is 'conducive to politics' to those termed 'instrumental', indicating a role which has a 'direct link to politics' (Cairney 2007).

It is with this classification that I take issue. I argue that occupation itself is no longer necessarily the point of interest here, but rather the *political* nature of these roles and the political experience that they bestow on individuals. The delineation in previous research of locally- and nationally-focused political experience is identified and supported, and the adaptation of this distinction for this thesis is discussed in chapters two and three. The chapter then considers studies of political elites in the more specific sense of cabinet or executive formation. These are limited in the British context, and none fully address the impact of pre-parliamentary political experience on career progression (King 1983; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2007; Dowding and Dumont 2009; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012). These studies, particularly Berlinski *et al*, will be returned to in more detail in chapter three when discussing the methodology used in the data analysis (2012). For now, it will be foregrounded that these studies are; firstly, limited in scope to cabinet appointments only (i.e. not looking at shadow ministerial appointments), and secondly, consider political experience as part of occupational experience, belying crucial differences between different types of pre-parliamentary political experience. As such, these studies do not ‘follow through’ MPs and do not offer a holistic look at a political career from its outset, but rather focus their gaze on the institution or position as the unit of analysis. An alternative criticism, primarily of King’s work, is that it is too qualitative and lacks a systematic analysis of career paths (1983).

Chapter two

In the second chapter I build on the first by detailing the potential link between pre-parliamentary political experience and political careers once elected to the House of Commons. I restate the existing classification utilised in the political recruitment literature, a classification which distinguishes between brokerage and instrumental occupations. This distinction is operationalised on available data since 1945, and this is shown graphically. Based on this operationalisation, I argue that this body of literature has told us two major things about British political life; firstly, that there is a great deal of occupational homogeneity across the three main parties in Britain, with most MPs having occupational backgrounds could be categorised as brokerage. Secondly, it is clear that there is an increasing minority of MPs with instrumental occupational backgrounds. The chapter then turns to political experience, making the argument that political experience should be considered as a stand-alone category when undertaking studies of political careers,

especially if the literature is using these studies to make claims about the political nature of pre-parliamentary life. Thinking about this political experience, I then consider what the utility of different types of experience, that based at the local and national levels respectively, is to a political career. Looking both pre- and post- election, I classify the potential benefits of different pre-parliamentary political experience as formal and informal. I end the chapter with a summary of the main arguments of the thesis, alongside a restatement of its research questions.

Chapter three

In chapter three I introduce the methodology and research design of the thesis, a cohort study approach. The aims of the chapter are threefold. First, to establish measures of political experience that are suitable to be operationalised in the subsequent data analysis. Second, to highlight other variables which need to be considered alongside political experience in the data analysis; and third, to introduce the data studied in the thesis through the outlining of some basic descriptive statistics at the same time as justifying the specific methodology used in the thesis, a cohort study of the 1997 general election cohort.

In the previous chapter, chapter two, I established the conceptual framework of the thesis, arguing that political experience should be considered as a standalone category, not subsumed into occupational classifications, and also that any classification needs to distinguish between different types of political experience. The work of chapter three is in part to outline how this distinction can be empirically operationalised in the data analysis which follows in chapters four and five. In support of this, I survey the available British and comparative literature, noting the different ways in which political experience is both construed and measured across different political systems. Having established a series of suitable variables which will be used throughout the data analysis within the thesis, I consider which other variables should be included in the quantitative analysis, specifically which variables to include in the regression models seen in chapter four. Again, I draw on the existing comparative literature, as well as other adjunct literatures of relevance and a series of variables are highlighted and marked for inclusion. These variables are then introduced alongside the political experience variables through some basic descriptive statistics.

I additionally justify the use of a cohort study methodology, contextualising this choice in the real-world political climate in which the 1997 general election took place. The unique opportunities which both this election and methodology afford a study of political careers are highlighted, but additionally, the chapter warns of some of the limitations of such a methodology. Overall, chapter three acts as a bridge between the conceptual groundwork of chapters one and two, which establish the conceptual contributions of the thesis, and the empirical findings of chapters four and five.

Chapter four

Building on chapter three, in chapter four I empirically establish the relative importance of pre-parliamentary political experience as something that affects parliamentary success using regression analyses of the cohort data outlined in the previous chapter and operationalising the variables discussed there. I open the chapter by highlighting other factors that could be variously expected to have an effect on the career trajectory of an MP. Building on chapter three, I outline a set of variables to be included in the regression models, including variables which measure different types of pre-parliamentary political experience. The variables which measure this distinguish between political experience gained on the local level and that gained on the national level. These are based on the conceptual groundwork of chapters two and three.

The analysis is split between an ordinal logistic regression model which looks at broad office achievement within the Commons, and further binomial logistic regression models which look specifically at achievement of frontbench and cabinet offices. There are some consistent findings across these models, namely that pre-parliamentary *does* have an effect on office achievement and career trajectory at all levels, but that this effect is not the largest in the model. Underlining the fact that those variables with consistently large effects, such as age at time of election and electoral majority, are unlikely to be unrelated to political experience, I lay the ground for a more nuanced analysis in chapter five. The empirical findings of the empirical analysis of the chapter, based on a cohort study approach, are original contributions to the existing literature which does not include any equivalent study, methodologically or conceptually.

Chapter five

Taking a cue from chapter four, I argue here that the other factors identified as having a large effect on career trajectory in the House of Commons are unlikely to be unrelated to pre-parliamentary political experience. In this chapter I map the ways in which these factors combine to provide individuals with pre-parliamentary political experience gained on the national level a preferential political career path compared to their colleagues who cut their political teeth at the local level. Moving chronologically from the stage of unsuccessful contestations of parliamentary seats at elections, and moving through to look at age at first election, electoral majority, first promotions and highest offices, I show how national-level pre-parliamentary political experience consistently provides politicians with opportunities to be elected younger, promoted faster, and end up in higher office than their colleagues with local experience.

Chapter six

In chapter six I turn to comparative political science and the literature of party politics, asking how the concepts developed in earlier chapters, borne out in the empirical analysis of chapters four and five, might be applied to the study of countries other than Britain. Drawing on the available comparative literature, previously discussed briefly in chapter three, a chronology of political experience is outlined, highlighting that different types of political experience are gained within three distinct sections of a career: pre-election, as part of the electoral process, and then post-election within a political institution. I propose that this chronology is likely to be of potential use to future comparative work in this field.

Having established this chronology, the chapter moves to delineate between the various types of political experience which can be gained across a career, building on the distinction made in chapter two between experience gained on the national level and that gained on the local level. Arguing that such a framework is applicable to broader comparative work, I distinguish between local and national political experience, elected and unelected experience, and then partisan and non-partisan experience. Illustrating how this classification is applicable to multiple cases, I draw on available comparative work for support before turning to the empirical question of how these various types of political experience will affect careers at different stages across varying political situations.

Looking at the ways in which three factors may affect the impact of political experience on political careers, I move from macro-scale considerations such as political system and institutional design to political party type, and then to the micro-level effect of individual-level characteristics. Addressing the ways in which political system and institutional structure will affect the collection and deployment of political experience in a polity, I draw on existing research which details the multi-level institutional movements of politicians in a political system, and furthers this work by considering how this will affect the ways in which individuals gain political experience. I argue that the location of the executive, the relative utility of intra-legislative experience, as well as professionalisation of local and regional legislatures will all change the incentives for a politician looking to gain the types of political experience which will best further their political careers.

Turning to the effect of party on political experience, I adopt the unified party typology of Krouwel (2006), which synthesises the numerous other classifications in the literature by focusing equally on organisational, political, and other aspects including the genesis of a party. I do not undertake an assessment of Krouwel's typology, however, as it is in the opportunity for simplification that it offers, rather than its potential verisimilitude, that its attractiveness lies. Delineating between cartel-, catch-all electoralist-, and business-type parties, I consider how these party types will affect the use of political experience at different stages of a political career, arguing again that differences between these types will result in different patterns of experience collection, as well as different career outcomes based on this. I root these discussions in case studies drawn from the existing literature, as well as the more theoretical literature which speculates on the potential future development of different party types.

Finally, I examine the impact of individual-level personal characteristics on political experience, arguing quite simply that politics will be experienced in different ways for different individuals, based on personal or group characteristics, and as such, this is likely to affect their interaction with it and the ways in which political experience is gained. Drawing from a substantial feminist literature which has noted the ways in which men and women experience political life in different ways, the chapter speculates that these differences will affect pre-election experience, and then in turn post-election attainment, for individuals from different groups within society. Linking this back to the discussion of party type and institutional arrangements above, I highlight the fact that differences in

these will too change the incentives for individuals, and that parties themselves can artificially manage these incentives through the use of, for example, sex quotas. In turn, this will in itself affect the use of political experience. The chapter concludes by foregrounding the ways in which these three factors are linked.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter of the thesis fulfils two main functions – to summarise and generalise the findings of the thesis. Firstly, I restate the original scholarly contributions of the work, and relate these findings to the research questions outlined above. I make clear that the thesis builds on existing academic work in the field of political careers by introducing new conceptual understandings of pre-parliamentary political experience as well as a new empirical finding; that pre-parliamentary political experience does affect political career trajectory within the House of Commons. Secondly, in the conclusion I will outline the relevance of the thesis findings to work across a broad range of academic literatures, and additionally highlight the ways in which the findings could be of interest to non-academic political practitioners. Having done this, I then lay out markers for future adjunct research based on the limitations of this study, acknowledged within. The thesis concludes with a brief summary of the research questions and findings.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the research focus of the thesis and justified it with reference to the empirical and conceptual shortcomings of the existing literature as well as normatively, locating the thesis in relation to broader work concerned with theories of political representation. Having done this, I then summarised the thesis in brief, outlining the direction that the arguments within will take, as well as highlighting the original scholarly contributions of the work. Outlining the core argument of the thesis, as well as its research questions, I have made clear where the original scholarly contributions of the thesis lie – in the creation of a standalone classification of political experience, and in the empirical findings that not only does pre-parliamentary political experience affect post-election parliamentary career paths, but that different types of political experience have differential effects.

In the next chapter I will review the relevant literatures in detail, utilising them to understand where this thesis can contribute to their understanding of political careers, as

well as assessing the extent to which this work can answer the research questions outlined above. I frame the review using the preoccupations of the existing literature on the topic, with three questions guiding it; first, who becomes an MP, second, how do they become an MP, and third, what do they do once elected? Finding that although it is useful, the existing work on the subject cannot answer the core research questions laid out in this chapter, I end the review by restating the direction of the thesis and offering some hypotheses which are then used to guide the conceptual and empirical analysis that follows.

Chapter One - Literature review

In the previous chapter I introduced the main themes and structure of the thesis, its research questions, and offered a normative justification for interest in the subject matter. The purpose of this chapter is to assess to what extent existing work can help answer the research questions laid out in the introduction namely ‘what is the effect of pre-parliamentary political experience on political careers in the UK parliament?’ and ‘do different types of experience have different effects on career trajectory?’ In other words, does the way in which MPs engage with politics prior to their election to the Commons have an effect on their career trajectory once they are elected, and is this effect the same for all types of experience? Across the British and comparative literature, studies of political careers are considered across three broad areas - who politicians are in terms of their personal and social characteristics; how they get into legislatures, considering processes of selection and election; and then what they do when in a legislature and what affects their behaviour (Searing 1985; Canon 1990; Searing 1994; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2007; Evans 2008; Ashe et al. 2010; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012; Carnes 2012).

I structure this review in such a way that reflects this literature, taking a tripartite structure which looks in turn at three questions which reflect the preoccupations of the existing literature. Firstly, the question ‘who becomes an MP?’ will be used to examine existing work which looks at the occupational, personal, and political backgrounds of MPs. It should be noted that for the purposes of this chapter, the focus will be less on the detailed findings of this literature but rather more on its broad approach and top-line findings, with more detail offered in chapter two. Secondly, I consider the structure of candidate selection processes. How do political parties provide formal and informal incentives for prospective candidates to seek out certain types of political experience? Thirdly, I address the question of what MPs do once elected and outline and assess the literature on parliamentary and executive careers in the House of Commons. Following this, I locate the thesis in reference to these literatures, and draw hypotheses from them.

Who becomes an MP?

In this section of the review I will discuss existing trends in political recruitment and the backgrounds of MPs. I argue that the existing literature largely considers pre-

parliamentary political experience as a subset of occupational experience. In this thesis I will develop this scholarship by suggesting that political experience should be considered as a stand-alone category, and two broad types of pre-parliamentary political experience will be outlined in support of this; experience gained on the national level of politics, and experience gained at the local level.

In this thesis I address research questions which ask whether political experience gained before becoming an MP affects career trajectories once in the Commons and whether or not different types of experience have different effects. A natural starting point is to establish what is already known about who becomes an MP, how they do it, and whether any existing work can contribute a full, or partial, answer to this research question. Previous work focusing on the question of *who* becomes an MP has concentrated primarily on MPs' prior occupations in addition to their social and personal characteristics, such as sex, race, and age at time of election (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997). These other factors will be considered in greater detail in chapter three. For now, in this section I trace the ways in which political experience has been understood in this existing literature, highlighting that it has been viewed primarily as a part of broader occupational experience.

What is the occupational background of MPs?

Occupation has been a core focus of existing elite studies of the House of Commons (Mellors 1978, pp.58-81). This is understandable; occupation can act as a proxy measure of social class, being tied up as it is with notions of social standing and income (Carnes 2012). Additionally, as noted by Mellors, it also 'naturally reflects the main features and trends' of MPs' educational background. More recently, occupation has also become another way of measuring pre-election political involvement, a proxy measure for careerism in many ways, particularly with the proliferation of full-time paid roles on the staffs of political parties and in the offices of MPs (Webb and Fisher 2003; Cairney 2007; Rush and Giddings 2011).

Early accounts of occupational background note the fact that many MPs were drawn from the same occupations (Jennings 1957, p.58; Mellors 1978, p.58), and this observation underpinned early attempts to classify these occupational backgrounds². Over time, these

² In these earlier works, including Jennings, for example, the emphasis is largely on the fact that MPs need an outside source of finance in order to subsidise the relatively small wage they would receive

developed into a primary initial classification of 'brokerage occupations', defined broadly as jobs that are 'conducive to politics' and offer 'flexible over time, generous vacations, interrupted career paths, professional independence, financial security, public networks, social status, policy experience and technical skills useful in political life' (Rush 1994, p.573; Norris and Lovenduski 1997, p.165). These are best exemplified in roles such as that of a teacher, law-based professions, trade union officials, journalists and political-related roles. Writing a decade later, Paul Cairney, however, argues that politically-related roles deserve to be recognised as a category of their own, which he terms 'instrumental professions' (Cairney 2007, p.215). These professions are those directly linked to politics in contrast to the brokerage professions which are amenable to a political career rather than part of the political world as such. Less of an effort has been made to classify these instrumental occupations than for the initially classified brokerage occupations and understanding of them seems to be limited, with most accounts being unsystematic in their consideration of the matter³. Within the instrumental category, Cairney includes journalism, 'occupations that provide an apprenticeship for higher elected office', or those that entail working closely with existing politicians, as well as mentioning individuals who pursue their duties as elected local councillors on a full-time basis (2007, pp.215-217).

Cairney's distinction between brokerage and instrumental is recognition of changing patterns in the composition of the House of Commons. Existing analyses of the Westminster parliament's occupants have concluded that it is an increasingly socially homogenous group of people, dominated by those from professional backgrounds broadly defined: over the last three decades, the extremes of Labour's manual workers and the Conservatives' landed gentry have made way for individuals from this middle-class professional centre ground (Norris and Lovenduski 1997, p.158; Best et al. 2001, p.73; Keating and Cairney 2006, pp.43-44; Cairney 2007, pp.213-214). However, it would be inaccurate to ignore differences in social and occupational background depending on party; despite this convergence of sorts, Labour MPs with professional backgrounds are more

for their parliamentary duties. Jennings writes, 'the 'bright young men' who want to 'go into politics' but 'have no money' have to be 'advised accordingly' (1957, p58).

³ Political writers of a 'popular' dint, such as Peter Riddell (1993) or Peter Osborne (2007), have written variously about the professionalisation of politics and 'the triumph of the political class', with academic work remaining largely silent in terms of further developing this 'instrumental' category.

likely to be drawn from the public sector than their Conservative counterparts who are more likely to be drawn from the private sector (Rush 1994, p.573; Keating and Cairney 2006, p.44). Utilising his own terminology, Cairney argues that the Westminster parliament has seen a shift from brokerage occupations, which dominated MPs backgrounds directly following the war until the mid-1970s, to a group of politicians that is increasingly drawn from his instrumental jobs category (Cairney 2007, p.218)⁴. Earlier studies of the Commons by authors such as Colin Mellors add weight to this thesis (1978). Norris and Lovenduski describe the rise of the 'talking professions' such as law, journalism, teaching and so on (1997, p.165; Best et al. 2001, p.77), and existing work looking at both the Labour and Conservative parties suggests that local party members may indeed be part of the cause of this, with studies suggesting that they are biased against candidates who are manual workers (Bochel and Denver 1983; Greenwood 1988). The number of representatives with a background in business is also striking, particularly on the Conservative benches, with roughly half of post-1997 Conservative MPs having such backgrounds, and even 8% of Labour MPs (Best et al. 2001, p.74) These processes of candidate selection will be addressed further later in this chapter and the range of empirical data relating to MPs backgrounds will be explored in greater detail in chapter two.

As Cairney himself notes, the literature often plays fast and loose with its own terminology, with words like 'professional' or 'middle-class' taking on multiple meanings dependent on the source (2007, p.213). To this list could be added 'career politician', a term that will be considered again in chapter two, used in varying ways by different authors (King 1983; Jun 2003) However, the broad thrust of the existing work, namely that many MPs have increasingly close links to Westminster and national-level political life prior to their election is clear, regardless of the terminology that is used to describe it. Given this development, and the more recent attention given to the notion of a political class (Cowley 2012), it is in many ways counter-productive to focus on occupation as an explanatory tool for these phenomena. Instead, the focus should be on political experience, as this is the characteristic which seems to be the cause for concern. That is, it is accepted that the characteristic binding many leading British politicians is their extensive political experience of the full-time paid kind, and their immersion in national-level political life prior to their election to the Commons. The opposite of this immersion is not a non-political occupation, but a different type of political experience.

⁴ These phenomena will be tracked statistically in chapter two.

Previous research has primarily focused on classifying the jobs that MPs had before they were elected to the Commons, and is in this sense largely descriptive. For the most part, the research has looked at which prior occupations were most common and has classified them in various ways, adjusting only slightly to allow for a distinction between directly political roles and those which are simply conducive to the political life. Attempts at utilising these categories to explain *why* they are so common are useful but under-developed, focusing on non-political resources, such as those identified above – financial resources, flexible working hours, and so on. The focus on occupation has obscured the prominence of various types of pre-parliamentary political experience present in the Commons since 1945. The main types are locally-sourced political experience, primarily local council experience, and national-level political experience gained in or around Westminster, typified in the instrumental occupations described by Cairney (2007). This classification does not account for the broader range of non-occupational political experience that aspirant parliamentary candidates are likely to have. Previous approaches also obscure the reality of political life. Important as having the time and financial resources to pursue a parliamentary seat are, without the necessary political contacts and networks, one is unlikely to succeed. This is where political experience is paramount. In the next section of this chapter, I will examine these two main variants of political experience, with arguments relating to the blurring of occupation and such experience being returned to in chapter two.

Patterns of pre-parliamentary political experience

It is almost a given that political parties in the UK are unlikely to select a parliamentary candidate who has shown no previous interest in politics or in their party. As such, it is to be expected that large numbers of parliamentary candidates have earned some ‘political apprenticeship’ (Ashe et al. 2010, p.458) which they are keen to display to local party selectors, something that has led authors to note that ‘structural integration seems more and more to be an important prerequisite and an element of a normal political career’ (Frankland 1977, p.138; Best et al. 2001, p.80, p.87). Discussing the notion of political career paths, and how they can become established within a system, Best et al note:

Both professionalisation and careerisation enable limited adaptation to change and a renewal of political personnel, since

they lay down a path to office for new contenders and provide them with the necessary means to follow it. On the other hand, they establish rules and procedures that integrate outsiders into the world of insiders and keep out of the game those challengers who are unwilling or unable to conform (2001, p.80).

Similarly, Jens Borchert notes how:

Politicians may move from party office to a legislature to a government to an interest group. They also move from the local to the national level or from the national to the regional. Moreover, they do so in patterns that vary systematically between different places, patterns that are reproduced through the knowledge of actors about the path taken by their predecessors and these and other actors' anticipation that established pathways might be a good guide for their own career plans (2001, p.1).

Currently, we understand little about how these processes function in the UK. What we do know is that they exist, and we know that there have been shifts in the frequency that they occur, something inherent in the development of the instrumental category by Cairney as discussed above (2007). Research looking at political pipelines is developing in the UK (Meryl Kenny 2009; Allen 2013), though it is considerably more developed in the US (Fox and Lawless 2004; Lawless and Fox 2005; Lawless 2012). Much existing research into the backgrounds of MPs (more often than not a component part of work on political recruitment in a broader sense, something to be addressed later in this chapter) has focused on occupational or personal background as opposed to political background, despite this process of becoming an MP being inherently political and steeped in a tradition of gaining political experience. As seen in Cairney's classification of occupational backgrounds, political experience is subsumed into the instrumental category, failing to highlight potential differences between different types of political experience.

Building on other recent research (Durose et al. 2011; Allen 2012; Durose et al. 2012), this thesis will distinguish between two broad, and dominant, types of political experience,

which will be referred to as ‘local’ and ‘national’⁵. The former is rooted in local political experience, for example having a record as an elected councillor. The latter taps into the idea of being present on the national political scene prior to election as an MP, working, for example, in either party HQ, an MP’s office, for a thinktank, or being a special adviser (SpAd) before becoming a member of the Commons. These will be briefly addressed in turn. The two categories that I focus on also have precedent in the existing literature (examined below and in chapter two), allowing any new findings to be contextualised in this work. In chapter two I will fully develop the classification of political experience to be used in the thesis in the context of political career trajectories, but here I will outline the ways in which the local and national traditions of political experience have shifted across the post-war period.

Local experience

Throughout the post-war period, a third of MPs at any time have been local councillors at some stage in their political lives (LGA 2008, p.26). In the 2010 parliamentary intake, 41.6% of new MPs had local elected experience, compared to 62% in the 1997 intake. This suggests firstly that there is a clear link between local and national politics in terms of political recruitment, and secondly, *prima facie*, a trend in decline. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

Rush notes how the proportion of Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs with local government experience rose throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and how the trend has even taken off within the Conservative party, albeit at a lower rate (Rush 1994, p.573; 2001, p.18). It is possible to speculate that local elected experience could be a way for individuals to show their loyalty to the party (Rush 1994, p.573), and in cases where the local service is in the same area of the constituency, a way of showing their loyalty to the local area, or even a badge of ‘localism’ (Rush 1969, p.79; Childs and Cowley 2011). In terms of candidate selection and political recruitment more broadly, the notion of localism is ill-defined, but some trends are apparent. The number of MPs and candidates claiming direct local connections to their constituency has increased significantly over the past decades (Rush

⁵ Durose et al. refer to ‘traditional’ and ‘professionalised’ pathways to politics, but the terminology used here regards political experience rather than occupational experience, hence I will use the new terms ‘local’ and ‘national’. This re-classification will be further discussed in chapter two. Additionally, these terms are relatively easy to grasp and are self-explanatory to a certain extent.

1994, p.575; Childs and Cowley 2011), as has the proportion of MPs being elected in the same region in which they were born (Best et al. 2001, p.86). Whether this is for electoral reasons or simply for practical reasons of comfort and ease for candidates is as yet unclear, and indeed is something that is worthy of attention in future research.

In spite of the rising value of local connections, it is not the case that being a local councillor is considered the gold standard of pre-parliamentary experience. When recruiting for the Scottish Parliament, the Labour party actively discouraged a 'councillor takeover' of the new body (Keating and Cairney 2006, p.50). There appeared to be a perception at the top of the party that the candidates who would no doubt be keen to make the step up from local to national politics may not be of the standards that they desired (Shaw 2001, p.38). There is further evidence in the literature for the idea that the local councillor made a second rate politician. At the end of the 1960s Michael Rush found that Conservative candidates in seats where they were challengers (as opposed to incumbents) were more likely to have local councillors as candidates than the other, presumably safer, seats. He also found that local connections and local government experience are more likely to be found amongst unsuccessful parliamentary candidates than those who do go on to win. 79.4% of candidates selected in challenger seats had local connections, compared with 62.8% in incumbent seats, with local government experience being the primary basis of this connection (1969, pp.60, 75, 97-98). Again writing about the Conservatives, Rush also finds that local government experience was:

Typical of certain types of candidate: more non-graduates than graduates, more non-public school than public school candidates, more Redbrick than Oxbridge graduates have had local government experience. It may be that local government experience is regarded as a partial substitute for the social background which these candidates lack (1969, p.79).

Research like this suggests that In this case it is local council experience that has both positive and negative implications for how an individual fares in comparison to the ideal type candidate a party is seeking.⁶ Such candidates were found to be preferred in Northern

⁶ This idea is common in the political recruitment literature, with Elizabeth Evans, for example, noting that the Liberal Democrat ideal woman candidate is 'white + no children + graduate+ no

constituencies more so than in the South, with Rush arguing that having local government experience may result in a candidate being perceived as having a 'parochial outlook' and a 'lack of wider experience' (Rush 1969, pp.79-80). Conversely, one instance where it would appear that having local government background is a bonus is if seeking selection for a marginal seat, be it one already held by the party or not, with 43.4 and 41.6% respectively of candidates in these seats having such experience (Rush 1969, p.99). This relationship does not appear to be present in the data gathered for analysis in this thesis on the 1997 general election, however – this will be explored further in chapter five.

Within the Labour party, Rush draws a distinction between candidates sponsored by trade unions and those sponsored by Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), arguing that CLP candidates are drawn from a middle-class pool not dissimilar to the Conservative candidates whereas union candidates tend to be more working class, and are also more likely to have local government experience (1969, p.206). Looking at seats where Labour was incumbent, 67.5% of trade union candidates had local government experience compared to 39.8% of CLP candidates. In non-incumbent seats, the trend is the same, with 69.5% of union candidates compared to 46.7% of CLP candidates holding local council experience (Rush 1969, p.181). Belchem notes how local government has consistently been easier to access for both the working class and women across the last 150 years, citing the fact that franchise extension occurred as early as 1869 for both of these groups as part of the Municipal Franchise Act, but only in local elections (1990, p.14). Additionally, a higher proportion of local councillors across England are women than is the House of Commons (Evans and Aston 2011). Reviewing this, it is possible to argue that local councils have the potential to act as a springboard into national-level elected politics for a broad range of people in terms of class and sex, but that party selection processes mediate this springboard effect. In some cases, local experience is valued, in others it is not. The ways that processes of candidate selection affect this are discussed below. The possibility of broader party type being linked to a party preferring certain types of pre-parliamentary political experience is addressed in chapter six, linking the thesis to comparative literature in this area.

previous experience' (2009). Such preferences are constantly in flux: for example, the July 2013 Labour party candidate selection scandal in Falkirk has led some Labour candidates to distance themselves from trade unions, announcing themselves as non-union backed candidates (see <https://twitter.com/SophyRidgeSky/statuses/354552643282145280>, last accessed 10-07-2013).

In addition to this formal type of local political experience, it is also likely to be the case that almost all MPs who are elected under the banner of a political party will have broader experience of local politics akin to that of a typical party member. Amongst other things, this could include campaigning for the party, voter canvassing, holding administrative or leadership positions within a local party, and being a regular or constant attendee at meetings of a local constituency party (Seyd and Whiteley 2004). In terms of the sample of MPs studied in this thesis, a large majority of MPs had experience of this kind, and in nearly all cases, it overlapped with either elected local council experience, or with national-level political experience such as working in or around Westminster. Clearly, local politics, particularly of the elected kind, acts a pathway to parliament, and has a key role in the recruitment of parliamentary candidates. As outlined in the previous chapter, a core concern of this thesis is path dependency; the idea that events that occur at one point of a political career can affect outcomes at a later stage. In light of this, it is worth considering whether local councils are neutral political recruiters – in other words, are all councillors equally disposed to consider running for higher office?

Local government in the United Kingdom – two types of councillor?

It is worth considering if a two-tier system is set in motion even earlier than the parliamentary candidate selection stage (Pitre 2003). The local government reforms overseen by the Labour government at the turn of the millennium resulted in an already complex system becoming even more so. The adoption of the executive system by large numbers of councils in place of the existing committee system has radically changed the role of what are now known as ‘backbench’ members. Council work relating to policy and delivery is now concentrated in the hands of cabinet members, leaving the new backbenchers to focus more on ward-facing work, primarily casework brought to them from constituents. There are 22,000 local councillors within the United Kingdom who serve terms of four years between elections (Wilson and Game 2006, p.252). The reforms enacted by New Labour gave councils four options to choose from when selecting a new structure, all of which were designed with the key aim of breaking up the previously combined roles of a councillor, representation and policy-making (Wilson and Game 2006). David Wilson and Chris Game accordingly refer to the new models offered to councils by the government as ‘separate executive’ models (2006, p.102). Overall, 81% of councils adopted a model which involved having a Council leader and a supporting cabinet (Wilson

and Game 2006, p.111). The majority of councils have split the various policy areas which they control into separate and distinct policy portfolios, each of which is held by an individual councillor. Complementing this executive function is a mechanism through which overview and scrutiny (O&S) can occur. In the initial government documentation relating to the reforms, O&S was seen as an area with huge potential, and indeed something that may add value to the role of backbench councillor.

Recent work in this area has suggested that these changes to the formal hierarchies of councils have not had an impact on the political ambitions of councillors – both backbench and frontbench councillors report roughly the same levels of ambition when asked if they have considered running for parliamentary office (Allen 2012). Whether this remains the case as the reforms embed themselves over time will have to remain to be seen. However, what did make a difference to whether or not councillors considered running for higher office was whether or not they received encouragement from other political figures or friends and family, with the encouragement of a sitting MP and party officials having particular influence on a decision (Allen 2013). Such findings relate to the central research questions of the thesis in two ways. Firstly, they suggest that local councils are not neutral political recruitment venues, raising the possibility that this is also the case for other sites of recruitment, something that has representative repercussions regarding access to political office at all levels. Secondly, it reinforces the rationale for the thesis by foregrounding the ways in which different factors, such as sex, or broader political activity, can affect outcomes at a later stage in a career.

National, Westminster-based experience

The increasing trend for MPs to have previously worked in ‘instrumental’ occupations is noted across the literature. More and more new MPs at some stage worked within their party, either within parliament itself, or elsewhere within the national-level professional political machinery (Rush 1994, p.574). These intra-party networks, however, are relatively under researched. Although not a new phenomenon there has been a steady increase in recent years. For example, in the 2010 Labour intake, 34% had professional experience in politics (precisely what this categorisation entails is unclear) (Durose et al. 2012).

Rush notes that the Conservatives have a longer history of party insiders becoming MPs than does the Labour party (1994, p.574), but in the wake of the 2010 Labour leadership

contest, it is clear that the party no longer lags far behind the Conservatives. A majority of the leadership contenders for the 2010 leadership selection contest held past experience as ministerial aides and advisors. Indeed, the three current leaders of the main political parties in the UK have all gained national-level pre-parliamentary political experience at some stage – Nick Clegg in Brussels as an MEP, David Cameron in Conservative Central Office and as a SpAd, and Ed Miliband in the office of then Chancellor Gordon Brown (Cowley 2012).

However, despite the increase in the visibility of this type of pre-parliamentary political experience, it is not dominant. Phillip Cowley writes, ‘for sure, this leaves a majority of MPs who enter the Commons without such experience, but it creates the potential for a two-track career path, with accelerated promotion for those with significant pre-Westminster experience and perhaps a slower route for those without’ (Cowley 2012, p.36). This second point from Cowley considers that this type of political experience may have knock-on effects when it comes to intra-parliamentary promotions. This is a development on other work which considers this insider, or professionalised, route solely in terms of political recruitment (Durose et al. 2012). Cowley’s suggestion is that although this group is not numerically large within the Commons overall, they may have particularly good access to higher-level positions. That is, their pre-parliamentary political experience is their passport to the frontbench⁷. An interesting question this raises relates to whether this increase then becomes self-fulfilling – aspirant politicians take note of who makes it to the top and who does not and then act accordingly, creating a feedback loop within this model of supply and demand (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). One of the key differentials between young, part-time local councillors and those individuals who work full-time in an instrumental political role is that for the latter, politics is their profession, they are professionally political if not actually professional politicians, and indeed this could lead to a more rapid appreciation of their opportunities for ascension, with their ‘professionalism breeding careerism’ (Borchert 2001, p.3). Such research is beyond the scope of this thesis, but this ‘chicken or egg’ question is something to be considered in future.

⁷ Durose et al.’s discussion of this type of experience (2012) is weakened by their assertion that this professionalised pathway to parliament ‘relies on less political experience’ (2012, p14). Presumably, they mean less *elected* experience. To term a route to parliament which involves working professionally in national-level politics as lacking in political experience is to belie the overt politicalness of it.

One of the drivers of change is the increase in the numbers of staff employed by political parties. This has resulted in a blurring of the distinction between pre-political experience in the traditional 'extra-curricular' sense as a local councillor or party helper, and seen a move towards people obtaining political experience as part of their main employment. Indeed, it is common to see aspirant candidates holding a combination of all of these things. Justin Fisher and Paul Webb (2003; 2003) conducted both quantitative and qualitative studies of Labour party employees based both at Millbank (the party headquarters in London) and other employees based around the country. Their research focuses on the role, attitudes and degree of professionalisation seen amongst the party staff in the context of their increasing prominence and importance (Webb and Fisher 2003, p.10). In terms of general characteristics, the authors find that Labour employees are well balanced in terms of sex, are generally middle-class (56%), are very well-educated with only 9% of respondents lacking a degree or vocational qualification, are mostly white and overwhelmingly likely to have union membership (Webb and Fisher 2003, pp.14-15). Utilising existing work to provide comparator groups for the data, Webb and Fisher find that party employees are substantially different to both party members more broadly and the electorate, whilst at the same time being similar to Labour MPs in terms of education and class (2003, pp.14-15).

Addressing the question of political ambition amongst party employees, Webb and Fisher find that 20% of employees plan to seek adoption as prospective parliamentary candidates in future, and a further 11% plan to mount a candidacy for a seat in the European parliament (2003, p.16). It is possible to speculate that party employment offers experience related to both the formal and informal workings and contacts of political life from a partisan perspective, and anecdotal evidence suggests that party employees network amongst themselves on a regular basis both in and outside of work hours, networks formalised in the Labour Staff Network, the Conservative Staff Group and Liberal Democrat Staff Group⁸. The question of institutionalisation can be raised here – to what extent does working in such an environment affect the political beliefs or outlook of an aspirant MP? In his diaries, discussing such political insiders, Chris Mullin writes, 'most have never, nor will they ever (in public at least), ask a question that betrays even a hint of scepticism about the official version of events' (Mullin 2011, p.13). There is a perception, made clear here, that

⁸ <http://www.w4mp.org/html/personnel/represent.asp>

such individuals, once elected, are likely to be party loyalists, again facilitating their fast promotion onto the frontbenches (Cowley 2012).

Scotland and Wales – similar trends?

The devolved legislatures are not part of the main focus of this thesis, but they do provide an interesting case study in the sense that they are geographically close to Westminster, but have a lifespan that is minute in comparison. Keating and Cairney, looking at the composition of political elites in devolved Scotland, found that rather than pave the way for a new politics with wider representativeness, devolution actually seems to have sped up the trend towards professionalisation, with more Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) being of a professional, middle-class background than the Scottish MPs who represent the same areas at Westminster, and indeed more than the non-Scottish MPs at Westminster (2006). The Scottish Parliament also has more women MSPs than Westminster does women MPs, but interestingly the women MSPs are proportionately more likely to be from a professional background than their male colleagues (Keating and Cairney 2006, pp.51-52). This again raises the question of how different pathways to parliament work for different groups of people. Overall, the experience of the new parliament in Scotland suggests that these trends towards political professionalisation, and the holding of national-level political experience prior to election, are not simply a product of the Westminster bubble.

Summary – a convergence of political and occupational?

As seen above, it can be argued that changes in the nature of British politics, with the hiring of more staff by MPs, political parties, and the growth of a political industry of think tanks and NGOs has led to a greater possibility of unelected full-time paid employment in political work.⁹ For a number of MPs, these are now the same thing. It was demonstrated above that existing classifications of MPs' pre-parliamentary experience focused on their occupational backgrounds, with political experience being considered as a sub-section of

⁹ The 1990s saw a growth in the policy advocacy role of UK NGOs, as they 'became increasingly involved in...policy work to influence the behavior [sic] and policies of consumers, corporations, governments and international organizations' (Hudson, 2002, p.402). See Hudson, Alan (2002), 'Advocacy by UK-Based Development NGOs', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31, pp. 402-418. The growth of the political arms of such organisations saw a growth in engagement with national governments and departments.

this (Cairney 2007). Other work has also noted the rise in the number of MPs with political backgrounds termed ‘professional’ (Durose et al. 2011; Durose et al. 2012). However, in an argument that will be further developed in chapter two, I instead contend that this existing classification fails to highlight the more complex reality of pre-parliamentary political experience. Firstly, placing various types of political experience into the instrumental category makes a tacit assumption that they of equal utility in a political career, or at least are, *de facto*, the same in some way. Secondly, it also fails to combine like with like - as discussed above, MPs having political experience is not a new phenomenon, with local government experience in particular having a long history in the House of Commons. As such, the rise of national-level political experience of a professional nature is a change in political experience, not solely in occupational backgrounds. In this vein, in chapter two and the thesis as a whole, I make the argument that political experience needs to be considered as a stand-alone category in analytical terms.

The existing work that has been outlined above is firmly interested in the question of where MPs come from, not whether this then has an effect on what they do following their election. As a result of this focus, it does not address the question of whether the pre-parliamentary political experience it tracks might affect political careers. I take this question as the focus of the thesis, developing and contributing this existing literature. In the next section of this literature review, I look at how political experience has an impact on the candidate selection processes of the three main British political parties, and will highlight the opportunities and constraints that having certain types of experience places on aspirant candidates. Prior to asking what happens once MPs are elected, I instead look at the process by which they get there – what do the parties want and what do candidates with certain types of political experience offer?

By what process do individuals become MPs?

Political parties are the gatekeepers of political office, controlling selection for candidacy for the House of Commons. The UK Government is made up Ministers and Secretaries of State drawn almost entirely from the House of Commons, with only a small number coming from the House of Lords (Rush, 1994, p.567). Promotion to government positions is controlled by the leadership of the governing party, and reflects the dominant role of political parties within the political career of any MP, or indeed any individual seeking any political office (Rush, 1994, p.568-9). Thus, if you want to be a government minister, and

are prepared to work to get there, the first thing to do, to quote Rush, is to 'pick your party' (1994).

This section will focus on the candidate selection processes employed by the three main parties in British politics; the Labour party, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats¹⁰. Of interest to this thesis is how these processes interact with political experience. Do some parties prefer local experience, whilst others prefer national? Does the electoral strategy of the party depend on the political experience of the candidate they select? This section will consider the three main parties in turn before providing a summary of the similarities and differences between them.

Understanding candidate selection: the theory of supply and demand

The challenge of explaining the high levels of homogeneity across parliamentarians has been taken up by a number of authors, mostly looking specifically at the low numbers of women in parliament. The dominant explanation is that of supply and demand, elaborated by Norris and Lovenduski in *Political Recruitment* (1995).

Norris and Lovenduski propose using the supply and demand model, more commonly seen in economics when describing the workings of markets, to help explain the underrepresentation of women, and other underrepresented groups of society, in politics (1995, pp.14-15). In other words, it allows an analysis of why parties select the candidates they do. The model assumes that there are two sets of processes that can explain the eventual outcome of the candidate selection process, those of supply or demand. The demand explanation assumes that selectors will base their decision about an aspirant based on the limited information they receive about them personally (such as a CV and/or a brief meeting) but then additionally on their perceptions about them, perceptions often based on wider stereotypes regarding the group from which they are drawn, be it white men, black women, their views of what characteristics an MP should have, and so on (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.14). The authors distinguish between direct and imputed discrimination, different ways of being either for or against something. Direct discrimination is defined as the 'positive or negative judgement of people on the basis of

¹⁰ Although not unheard of, Independent MPs are rare in the UK Parliament, with political parties functioning as the primary vehicle through which candidates are selected and then elected as MPs, a system that has been in place since at least as early as the eighteenth century (Best et al 2001, p.69).

characteristics seen as common to their group, rather than as individuals' (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.14). Imputed discrimination is seen in cases when selectors themselves claim to support an aspirant but couldn't select them because, for example, the electorate wouldn't vote for them. The demand-side explanation of women's underrepresentation posits that the make-up of parliament is as a result of these two types of discrimination being at work in the candidate selection process (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, pp.14-15).

The supply argument adopts a different approach, positing that 'outcome reflects the supply of applicants wishing to pursue a political career' (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, p.15). This places the onus more on the underrepresented group, as such, when trying to explain their underrepresentation. It is not, however, quite as simple as this. It is feasible that there exists a feedback loop of sorts resulting in women, for example, not coming forward to run for political office because there are not many women at the top of politics, creating an impression that women cannot succeed in politics (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, p.15). It is clear that the two factors interact.

A supply and demand explanation can be utilised to consider the ways in which parties may prefer candidates with certain types of pre-parliamentary political experience. These ideas can also be applied to characteristics that are not inherent like gender; for example, parties may desire local candidates ahead of those who are not from or linked to the area. Parties may prefer candidates of a certain age, candidates who hold certain views or sit within certain factions of the party, and so on.¹¹ As noted above, the Labour party was slow to select large numbers of candidates with local council backgrounds around the time of the first elections to the Scottish parliament - that is, the party had low demand for such candidates (Keating and Cairney 2006).

The nature of the institutional structure surrounding aspirant politicians in terms of candidate selection processes can be viewed through an explicitly institutional lens, in both formal and informal senses of the word (Cheng and Tavits 2011). Taking its cue from historical institutionalism more broadly, this thesis is interested in looking at path dependencies in political careers, asking 'who wins, who loses and why?' (Steinmo 2001,

¹¹ The supply and demand model is not without its critics. Krook outlines three key criticisms of the model prior to suggesting that there is a step forward to be made if feminist scholars look towards an institutionalist approach for pointers (2009, p.4).

p.3). Conversely, following the work of rational choice institutionalists, the thesis is also interested in whether the early stages of the process we will refer to as a political career 'sets the pace' for the latter stages (Pitre 2003). In many ways, an institutionalist approach is useful for this thesis. Jeanette Ashe et al point out how the idea of a political apprenticeship is a clear example of a practical institution, noting its role as an 'important, albeit not always necessary, pre-requisite for candidates, especially those seeking selection in a party's best seats' (2010, p.458). This places the notion of a political apprenticeship within an institutionalist analysis of candidate selection processes, utilising Steinmo's assertion that institutions will 'influence what these actors believe to be both possible and desirable' (2001, p.1).

Candidate selection in the Conservative Party

The process of becoming a parliamentary candidate for the Conservatives has been reformed fairly extensively in recent years, particularly following the victory of David Cameron in the 2005 leadership contest and this has resulted in a renewed scholarly interest in the process (McIlveen 2009; Childs and Webb 2012; Hill 2013). The direction of recent reforms within the party have broadly seen an increased influence of the central party apparatus on candidate selection at a local level, although the final decision on candidate selection still remains very much that of the local association (Childs and Webb 2012, pp.85-86).

The recent attempts to reform candidate selection within the Conservative party highlight the tensions between the central and local party that are present within such processes, as well as underlining the role that political experience plays in this process. Indeed, it is clear that different types of political experience are preferred by different sections of the party. Cameron's primary rationale for reforming candidate selection processes was that increased diversity would be electorally beneficial for the party. In his acceptance speech directly after he won leadership of the party, he declared that he wanted a more representative parliamentary party and to put an end to low numbers of elected Conservative women, a phenomenon he dubbed 'scandalous' (Childs and Webb 2012, p.63). The reforms can be seen as a compromise of sorts, with the central party stopping short of imposing certain candidates on local parties but still shaping the nature of the selection process to assist their preferred candidates in many ways. Sarah Childs and Paul Webb argue that the Cameron reforms can be seen as attempts to create a demand for

women candidates (amongst other traditionally-underrepresented groups) and at the same time, change the selectorate itself, mostly by opening it beyond the traditional participants, a double-whammy movement of sorts. There has also been a distinct lack of working-class Conservative MPs over the years. Michael Hill posits that ‘the main obstacle to selecting working-class candidates lay with the individual constituency associations, who were still reluctant to choose candidates who were not from a middle-class, professional background’ (2013, p.81). In other words, there was little demand for candidates that did not fit the bill, which itself was decided on by constituency associations.

A ‘Priority List’ of candidates was assembled by central office, purporting to contain the top 50 men and women candidates, and it was expected that constituency associations would select their candidates from this list, though this was not compulsory (McIlveen 2009; Childs and Webb 2012, p.76; Hill 2013). In addition to this was a rule that required, at each stage of the selection process, 50% or more of those listed to be women, as well as the inclusion of central office in the process of ‘sifting’ through applications to be put forward for shortlisting (Childs and Webb 2012, p.76). Childs and Webb argue that this strategy, which saw the ‘best’ women candidates going before local selectorates, left the latter in a situation where they would find it extremely hard to *not* select them (Childs and Webb 2012, pp.76-77).

The mechanics of the process have also been changed, with candidates now having to focus less on a heavily-weighted speech to the local party, with this instead making way for an approach based more on a series of questions and answers. Alongside these subtle measures promoting equality of selection are more braggadocio ones such as the screening of a DVD prior to selection meetings which emphasises the importance of descriptive representation to the future of the party (Childs and Webb 2012, p.76). Finally, the selectorates themselves have also been changed, with open primaries and community panels being utilised in some seats to broaden the field of those actually selecting the candidates. The assumption is that the general public are less averse to the idea of women politicians than party activists (Childs and Webb 2012, pp.78-79). However, it is still possible for a local executive committee to avoid the above and revert to old models of selection, but only if they choose an all-women shortlist to select their candidate from. Arguably the influence of the central party is felt no matter which way the local parties move.

Childs and Webb note that one unintended consequence of the moves towards a process of candidate selection that promotes the selection of women is the rise of the oppositional 'local man':

Candidate selection is a prized benefit of party membership and Cameron's efforts looked to be perceived on the ground as unwarranted central intervention underpinned by political correctness. Critics contended that it was evidence that Cameron spent too much time in West London, a euphemism for metropolitanism. The Priority List, in particular, generated intra-party antipathy at best, if not outright hostility. 'Good men' were said to have been left off the list in order to make place for 'less good' women (Childs and Webb 2012, pp.79-82).

Speaking to wider debates, relevant to this thesis, of localism and the role of the local in candidate selection (as well as British politics more broadly), this interaction between issues of competing claims for representation, equality, and 'localness' are of great significance. Amongst other things, this preference for 'local' candidates will privilege political experience gained on the local level over that gained nationally, in theory making it harder for those individuals who have worked in or around Westminster to be selected. It is feasible that those seats which are more likely to remain Conservative at future elections, safe seats, will be even more closely guarded by their constituency association members.

If women, or individuals drawn from other societal groups, are more likely to have certain types of political experience than men, and certain types of political experience are privileged by the process of candidate selection, this too will affect both supply and demand factors. It is possible to speculate, for example, that political experience of certain types will be correlated with candidates being either younger or older than their colleagues, namely candidates who have national-level political experience. Within the Conservative party, the reforms described above caused resistance in other forms, with some warning against 'a cult of youth' (Hill 2013, p.85). In this way, political experience may be related to other factors which will influence the decisions of selectors. It is clear that political experience has a role to play in candidate selection in the Conservative party.

Candidate Selection in the Labour Party

Candidate selection in the Labour party is best characterised as even more locally-focused, and potentially more fractious, than within the Conservative party. The process begins and ends at the local level, in contrast to the arguably more centralised operation within the Conservative party, something established early on by the National Executive of the party (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Shaw 2001). The procedure was not questioned until intra-party conflict between the left and the more centrist figures led to a campaign forcing all sitting MPs to face mandatory reselection should they wish to stand again in the seat they currently occupied (Shaw 2001, p.36). Following this development, there was a fear that MPs would be in thrall to the small numbers of activists within their constituency who would have the power to reselect them. As such, moves were successfully made to implement 'one member one vote' (OMOV) which resulted in the entire membership within a constituency having the right to vote to select a candidate. Shaw notes that the above developments may have shifted power to the grassroots, but the NEC simultaneously gained almost total power over the selection of by-election candidates (2001, p.37). Following the 1997 election, a powerful and confident Tony Blair was keen to re-examine candidate selection more broadly as part of the process of devising guidelines for selecting candidates for the new Scottish and Welsh devolved bodies as well as for the London mayoral and assembly positions. Shaw posits that there were two key goals of the changes; the first, to increase the diversity of Labour's parliamentary candidates in terms of sex and ethnicity, and the second to increase their 'quality', evidently a more subjective goal than the first (2001, p.46). Particularly in the devolved bodies, there was a fear that long-term established local favourites may get the nod ahead of candidates who the party leadership deemed more appropriate and more qualified (Shaw, 2001, p.38). This raises a more normative question not considered fully in this thesis, whether or not a trend of local candidates becoming MPs is inherently a good thing or not, either in terms of the 'quality' of MP, or in the pursuit of an increased diversity of representation (Childs and Cowley 2011).

The action of most relevance here was the establishment of a *vett*ed parliamentary panel established by the NEC, a step previously not taken. Previously, there existed four lists, known as the A, B, C and D lists, which were maintained by unions, constituencies, the Cooperative party and the women's list (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). According to the

Labour party rulebook, constituencies and affiliated organisations can still recommend candidates who will be automatically included on the list, but these candidates must have met certain criteria which will have been established between the organisation in question and the NEC (Labour Party 2008, p.30). This centralisation represents a desire on the part of the New Labour establishment to exert more control over the candidate selection process, and ultimately the type of MPs they will have at Westminster. Union sponsorship is a trend that has decreased within the party, but is still present in some form. Rush identifies how there has been a shift within the nature of union sponsorship, with sponsored candidates changing over time from being manual workers and 'shopfloor' candidates to a position of unions sponsoring individuals without direct industrial experience, namely lawyers, journalists and so on (1994, p.574).

As with the Conservative party, candidate selection is a contested element of the political life of the Labour party. In terms of political experience, it is clear that having local experience will be potentially useful in gaining selection as a prospective parliamentary candidate, but equally that the role of national-level political influences will also be felt in this process, giving those individuals with national-level experience an opportunity to deploy their resources in the process. Around the time of the OMOV debate, and in the decade or so that followed, the varying political preferences of different sections of the party resulted in similarly varying preferences for candidates. As with the Conservative party, it is likely that certain types of political experience were more welcome than others, with national-level experience, gained as part of the central party apparatus, potentially treated with greater suspicion by CLPs keen to assert their autonomy.

Candidate selection in the Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats have become of increasing interest to political scientists since the 1990s as their vote share has increased and entrenched them as key players in Westminster politics (Evans 2008, p.591). Indeed, the Liberal Democrats currently occupy the seat of government in coalition with the Conservatives, and as such, the party is now of more interest than it has been for almost a century before. The candidate selection process of the Liberal Democrats is very much a local one, with little interference from the central party at Cowley Street, and local also in the sense that only members living within a constituency can take part in the selection vote (Evans 2008, p.591). However, like Labour

and the Conservatives, the party operates a centralised list of approved candidates (Evans 2008, pp.594-595).

An example of the central party's reluctance to interfere with candidate selection processes is the non-pursuit of action that may result in an increased number of women being selected to stand for election. Indeed research has shown how the Liberal Democrats consistently perform badly in terms of increasing the numbers of women in their parliamentary ranks (Evans 2008, p.590). Elizabeth Evans utilises Norris and Lovenduski's supply and demand model to analyse the possible reasons for this. She concludes that there is a clear demand-side problem, although acknowledges that there is a potential supply-side problem in terms of the lack of diversity amongst those women coming forward as candidates, namely that women without children are disproportionately overrepresented (2008, p.600, p.604). One of the key issues identified in her analysis is that the party seemed unwilling to select women in winnable seats, and have even gone to the lengths of manipulating seat classification in order to create the impression that they had actually done the opposite (2008, p.598; Harrison 2009, p.38). The party also appear resistant to any sort of positive action, namely gender quotas as seen in the Labour party with all-women shortlists. Arguably, there is an inherent tension between the ideological tenets of liberalism and the notion of preferential treatment for one type of person present in a sex quota (Evans 2008, pp.601-602). Lisa Harrison, who similarly utilises the supply and demand model to analyse the selection process of the Liberal Democrats, suggests that the party are more comfortable with 'facilitating' steps towards an increase in women MPs than 'parity' steps (2009, p.37).

Another key factor in the party noted by both Evans as well as Harrison is the Liberal Democrat desire to take advantage of localism by embedding a candidate, who will often be full-time, into the public life of an area for a significant amount of time prior to an election (Evans 2008, p.594). There is a potential for such a desire on the part of the party to damage the chances of women candidates who may have other commitments, or who may not be in a financial position to suspend working in order to campaign. Conversely, it could also be argued that the desire for localism, and a local figure, combined with high numbers of Liberal Democrat women councillors, makes these councillors obvious potential candidates. Why this is not happening is open to debate. Evans, combining statistical analysis with semi-structured interviews, noted a strong masculine ethos that is embedded

into the core of the party, a potential cause of this (2008, p.600). This can be related to the idea that if certain types of political experience are privileged by local party organisations, this will benefit those individuals who have best access to these types of experience. As already noted, recent research has highlighted the ways in which local council experience is not a neutral political recruitment vehicle, with certain groups of councillors more likely to use it as a political springboard than others (Allen 2012, 2013).

Similarities across the three main parties

Despite their differences, there are clear points of similarity in the candidate selection processes of the three main parties. There is a key role for sub-national party organisations within each party in the process of candidate selection, something that could perhaps be described as the 'pay off' that central parties have to submit to in order to maintain effective local parties (Best et al. 2001, p.70). The nature of a political party, particularly in terms of structure, is likely to affect the relative importance of different types of pre-parliamentary political experience to the party. That is, certain parties will value certain types of experience over others. This relationship between political party type and political experience will be explored in greater depth in chapter six.

Clearly, the presence of local-central tension will affect the nature of the candidate selection, what it means to the parties involved, and the candidates selected by it. As Childs and Webb note, the selection itself can grow beyond its usual purpose, becoming a site of the contestation of power between various factions of a political party (2012). Questions relevant to this thesis spring from these speculations. If constituency parties are indeed focusing on the selection of local candidates (possibly local men) as a rebuttal of sorts to the perceived interference of central party organisations in the selection process, they are likely to pick candidates with impeccable local credentials – local councillors, perhaps, and if not councillors, then certainly individuals rooted in the community in some obvious way (see Childs and Cowley, 2011 for discussions of localism). They are likely to pick candidates who could be seen as having loyalties to the constituency as opposed to the central party, something that is an opposite of sorts to the situation for candidates with extensive experience at the central party or Westminster level.

Conversely, however, a job within the Westminster bubble of national-level politics, particularly for a political party, offers an individual access to useful networks of

information and contacts that can be used both before and after any possible election to parliament (Rush 1994, p.573; Jun 2003, p.172). Proprietary information relating to the future availability of a prized safe seat would be one possible example of the benefits of being a part of such a network, in addition to having a high-profile party figure lobbying the local party on behalf of a prospective candidate (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.60). These issues will be considered in greater depth in chapter two, and throughout the thesis as a whole.

What is made clear above is that pre-parliamentary political experience of different kinds has a role in the candidate selection processes of the main three parties in Britain. Although this role is not formalised, it has the potential for great influence, particularly at times when candidate selection processes become the political footballs of intra-party conflict. Having established both who MPs are and how they get there, I now turn to the final of the three questions posed at the opening of the chapter, what do MPs do once elected?

What do MPs do?

Although getting elected is tough, what comes after is in many ways even more complex. The role of an MP is multi-faceted, initially on a simple Westminster versus constituency basis, but then in a far more complex way within parliament, and there exists no formal job description (Norton 1994, p.705). The distinction of constituency versus Westminster service, and the dual nature of the role of MP, is made across the relevant literature, and perhaps offers a useful starting point. One significant trend that has developed hugely since the war, and particularly notably in the electronic era, has been the amount of time that MPs devote to constituency matters (Buck and Cain 1990; Rush 1994, p.578). The increase in the amount of time, effort and resources that MPs are spending on dealing with constituency matters, specifically casework, both physically within the constituency and at Westminster, increasingly through online channels such as email and even Twitter, is acknowledged in the literature (Gay 2005; Ward and Lusoli 2005; Norton 2007; Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward 2008; Jackson and Lilleker 2011). In this section of the chapter, I briefly outline the roles of a backbench and frontbench MP respectively before considering the implications of this for the subject of the thesis, political experience.

Focus on the constituency is particularly stark for backbench MPs, those without frontbench responsibilities within their parties. Oonah Gay offers a concise analysis of both the symptoms and the causes of this phenomenon, the core element of her argument that such a trend suits the government as it results in less time being available for MPs to 'make a nuisance' of themselves (2005, p.57). Additionally, it provides the government with an direct contact line to the country at large in the shape of their own MPs (2005, p.58). Constituency surgeries are a long established part of the life of an MP and date from the 1960s. The sheer volume of constituent-representative communication has increased hugely in the same time, though, requiring MPs to make the best use of new resources made available to them in order to deal with it. Such resources include parliamentary money and new technology including email and constituency databases (Gay 2005, pp.58-59, pp.62-63). Asking what has driven such an increase, Gay posits that an increasingly aware and educated electorate who are aware of their ability to challenge official decisions are driving the process, as well as a belief on the part of MPs that focusing on local issues will benefit them when seeking re-election. This a belief particularly held in seats that reflect the wider decline of the two-party system, a belief previously held far more strongly in the United States and also known as the incumbency effect (Carson, Engstrom, and Roberts 2007), but something that has also been considered in the British case previously (Gaines 1998; Heitshusen, Young, and Wood 2005). This links in to the notion of an MP as a local campaigner, with the Labour party even going as far as to introduce targets related to this, asking their MPs to contact over 100 voters per week as part of a continuing local strategy (Gay 2005, p.63). With parliamentary money being made available to MPs with which they are meant to inform their constituents of their work, there is a thin line between doing this and actually campaigning, perhaps increasing the potential for an incumbency effect to have influence (Gay 2005, p.64). Gay highlights a tension within the role of an MP between the need to address the issues and concerns of constituents and the constituency as a whole, and the duties of scrutiny that they are expected to fulfil at Westminster, a restatement of the classic Burkean tension inherent in the act of representation (2005, p.65). It would seem to be a basic distinction, perhaps too simplistic, but the possibility of there being a fluctuation in the time and effort devoted to each does seem to be grounded in fact.

Donald Searing offers a fine-grained analysis of the role of the constituency MP. He identifies two sub-sets of the 'constituency member' role (Searing 1985, p.355); the

‘welfare officer’ and the ‘local promoter’. The former focuses on individual-level constituency issues, generally from individual constituents. These could include housing issues, problems relating to various aspects of the welfare state, or simply other personal issues (Searing 1985, pp.357-358). The local promoter is less likely to focus on being a micro-level problem solver and instead devote their time to focus on the more collective needs and interests of the constituency as they see them (Searing 1985, pp.359-360). Searing is clear that these categories are in no way mutually exclusive, and many MPs who are classified as one hold a number of attributes of the other. He is also able to draw a distinction here in the activities of these two ‘real types’ of constituency member (Searing 1985, p.352). He highlights how welfare officer constituency members are more likely to discuss their constituency activity in terms of constituency surgeries where constituents can speak to them, or even mobile surgeries in different areas of the constituency, both on a more formal level and also an informal level, for example seeking out constituents with problems in local pubs and clubs (1985, pp.357-358). A key distinction between welfare officers and local promoters is the tendency for the former to address problems themselves that the latter would most likely refer to local government (1985, p.358). Some welfare officer constituency members may even stretch their brief to include dealing with some constituents personal issues that may be considered outside of the purview of an MP’s role, traditionally perceived, with Searing describing one MP who made regular visits to a woman in his constituency who had tried to commit suicide previously (1985, p.358).

Conversely, local promoters discuss their role as constituency members more in terms of visiting local business and industry, hospitals, schools and so on than they are to talk about constituency surgeries (1985, p.359). One local promoter constituency member interviewed by Searing described his role as tantamount to being a ‘catalyst’ within his constituency, ensuring the harmonious functioning of the composite parts. Other frequently mentioned aspects of this role included having an influence on planning applications, town centre rejuvenation, for example, and also influencing other investment in services such as roads (Searing 1985, p.359-360).¹²

¹² Searing goes on to discuss how these roles impact on ‘behaviour’. He does this by analysing time spent by each MP in the constituency (more for ‘constituency members’ than MPs who do not fit this ‘real type’), cross-voting behaviour, namely voting against the party whip (there is not much of interest here, but Conservative ‘constituency members’ are found to be more likely to vote against the party whip than their Labour counterparts).

This analysis fails to separate, or take into account, certain factors. There doesn't appear to be a recognition that the progression *into* these roles in the first instance may be of huge interest. This could be accounted for simply by understanding that parliament at the time was essentially homogenous, composed of white men. As such, a party analysis could be used as a crude class division (Labour as working class and Conservative as more middle and upper), and indeed this perception is hinted at when discussing possible reasons for the phenomena identified in the piece (Searing 1985, pp.371-372).

The salient point here is that in many ways, particularly for the political parties, all things local (i.e. good local contacts, a local profile, local knowledge) are good things. Thus, it stands to reason that local councillors becoming MPs, from this starting point, is also a good thing for political parties. Whether or not this is the case isn't the research question of this thesis, interesting though it may be, and of more interest here is whether parties take advantage of the fact that many MPs have been local councillors by getting them to focus primarily on this type of localised activity once an MP at Westminster. That is, do they carry on the work of being a local councillor from an office in London? Or are MPs with local council backgrounds simply more likely to focus on constituency matters than their colleagues who ascended to their seat through central party roles, and who may already be used to the glitz and glamour of ministerial-level political life.

Frontbench career paths in the Commons

For those MPs who make it beyond the backbenches, there lies the prospect of a frontbench position. It is no surprise that there exists an established body of literature which looks at the role and formation of the executive within the House of Commons, with such a subject providing great fodder for academic and popular writers alike. Of key interest to my own research are those studies which address the recruitment and composition of the executive and/or the frontbench in addition to any which consider career progression in the broader sense¹³.

¹³ This thesis will not consider select committee careers in its analysis. In 1997, select committees were yet to take on the powers they currently hold, and as such, they were not seen as a vehicle for a parliamentary career, although this changed over the next thirteen years (Benton and Russell, 2012). To track these changes as part of the thesis would result in such an analysis of backbench

The latter are particularly few and far between. Of note are E. Gene Frankland's 1977 comparative study of career progression in both the UK and West Germany (Frankland 1977) and Mellors' socio-economic study of the Commons (1978). Of those studies which focus on Cabinet and executive formation, two recent studies by Samuel Berlinski, Torun Dewan, and Keith Dowding (Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2007, 2012) provide, in both a comparative and UK-only format, a closer look at the nature and duration of cabinet careers whilst incorporating some aspects of more holistic career studies, such as Frankland's (1977). To clarify, I would class a holistic career study as one which looks at the ways in which individuals move through different levels and locations of an institution(s) whilst assessing how these interlink. In contrast, a focused study is interested in a specific role, job, or position within an institution, such as the cabinet, and this is the primary unit of analysis rather than the individual.

It is first worth noting that it is not possible to provide an answer to the question posed in the title of this thesis using existing work, although some work brings us closer than others. Frankland's 1977 study takes the approach that is perhaps the closest to the one utilised in this thesis in methodological terms. Crucially, however, the study is comparative, focusing dually on the British Parliament and the German *Bundestag*, and thus has a broader interest than the specific effect of pre-parliamentary political experience directly. Rather, Frankland's core argument is that intra-parliamentary factors (i.e. those factors which kick in *following* election to the institution in question) are better at explaining variation in parliamentary career attainment than those which are pre-parliamentary in nature (in this he includes all socio-economic indicators, sex, age, etc. in addition to any prior political experience) (Frankland 1977, pp140-2). Using a sample of 984 MPs from both parliaments who were first elected within the same period (1950-61), he uses regression and correlation to analyse how parliamentary service, measured by the number of years an MP has been in the Commons, is the main predictor of success. That is, the longer you are in, the better you generally do (Frankland 1977, pp149-50). In many ways, the findings of the study are not particularly revolutionary, with it being an almost self-evident truth that longer inhabitancy of the Commons will probably correlate with doing more (this was, Frankland notes himself, a time when many who didn't get promoted were more likely to

career paths being rather weak, and as such, I will instead note in the conclusion that this would be an interesting direction for future work.

leave than remain in the Commons and establish themselves as long-standing backbenchers making his finding even more of a self-fulfilling prophecy) (1977, p138). Instead of the findings, it is the methodology which stands out in addition to the suggestions for future work which close the piece. As noted above, Frankland utilises cross-sectional data collected on a relatively large sample of MPs (479 of whom are British MPs, the other 505 German) who were elected at roughly the same time, an approach not far from the cohort study method utilised in this thesis. In addition, he too approximates a hierarchy of parliamentary positions which also includes shadow frontbench appointments (i.e. those of the opposition rather than governing party), an approach also incorporated into this thesis. His hierarchy allows for a differentiation between frontbench appointments at the junior ministerial level, for example, and those to the cabinet level (Frankland 1977, p141). A similar hierarchy used in this thesis will be discussed in greater detail in chapters two and three. Of vital importance here is to note how Frankland's methodological approach, including the cross-sectional data he uses, allows him to unpick the individual effects of various factors on career progression, something which he is able to measure across different political parties (and even different parliaments in this case), even if he is not actually particularly interested in these contributions.

He ends the article by calling for more detailed country-specific studies of career progression;

If MPs tend to achieve leadership positions largely because of lengthy apprenticeship, which socializes them into the norms of the parliamentary party, what factors determine who gets the chance to become an apprentice? Do individuals of certain backgrounds get an earlier start up the career ladder? I found that about seventy percent of those who reached top leadership levels had attained some nonbackbench position during their first term. Which apprentice positions are more likely to be stepping stones or to be deadends? When does seniority (or age) begin to work against one's getting off the backbench? (Frankland 1977, pp.150-151).

It would seem, however, that this call has remained unheeded, with a distinct lack of systematic career analyses remaining. Perhaps the most comprehensive work in this area is

that of Berlinski, Dewan and Dowding (2007, 2012) who have collected similar cross-sectional data on all cabinet ministers in the post-war period, providing the most in-depth account of their work in *Accounting for Ministers*, a book published in 2012. As the name of their book suggests, however, they are interested solely in those who make it into the government rather than the larger cohort, including backbenchers, which both Frankland and this thesis include (1977). Additionally, their main focus is on 'who serves in government and how long they serve for' (Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012, p1), not on how they get there, or on which factors affect who gets there, although the latter is addressed in the book. Finally, their work does not encompass shadow appointments, analysing solely those appointed to government positions.

Berlinski et al. state that their unit of analysis is 'the individual minister' and that they will provide data which will shine a light on the 'career trajectories of different ministers in British government' (2012, p1). However, there are a number of characteristics of the study which limit the amount that it contributes to answering the research questions of this thesis, namely that a) the authors are interested in a different research question themselves (the tenure of ministers in cabinet positions) and b) the variables included in the analysis are not wide-ranging enough to comprehensively account for the patterns identified. In terms of the latter, the authors essentially omit any discussion of pre-parliamentary political experience or occupation (the list of variables included in the analyses is available in *Accounting for Ministers* p60).

Berlinski et al. also produce different findings to Frankland, perhaps most crucially in that they find 'the existence of systematic features of ministerial tenure related to the ministerial characteristics which are independent of the aspects of the government' (2012, p86). That is, it is not simply intra-parliamentary characteristics that make a difference, a finding contrary to that of Frankland (1977). Again, although the variable of interest for Berlinski et al. is ministerial tenure, they find that education and gender in particular have an effect, with women ministers and those with an Oxbridge education tending to survive longer than their colleagues who are either men or did not attend Oxbridge (Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012, pp83-4), something that suggests these variables may also be of note when looking at initial access to these positions, not just how long they are occupied. However, the study provides no comparison with backbenchers, those who are

not promoted at all, and does not consider extra-parliamentary political experience in any great depth.

In conclusion, these studies provide fodder for thought in terms of what they do tell us about parliamentary careers and the methods they used to uncover that information, but perhaps more interesting is what they do not tell us. There exists no systematic study of how pre-parliamentary political experience, arguably a key component of a political career, affects parliamentary career trajectories, thus shedding no light on whether this factor holds explanatory power when addressing the question of why some people make it to the very top of British politics whilst others do not.

Path dependency and the effect of pre-parliamentary political experience

Based on the above, I will now set out the argument of the thesis. Essentially, the rationale is that there does exist an extensive body of work which considers parliamentary personnel, their backgrounds, and their recruitment. This literature additionally acknowledges the influence of various characteristics, such as sex, age, and political experience, at various stages of these processes, most notably on the recruitment stage. Concurrently, there exists a more limited literature which uses cross-sectional individual-level data to examine the ministerial and parliamentary careers of MPs in the House of Commons. This literature, amongst other limitations, however, does not look at the role of pre-parliamentary political experience in parliamentary career progression in a sophisticated way. The review has highlighted shifts in the nature of this pre-parliamentary experience that require both recalibration of the existing schema of classification in addition to new research using data from a more recent era. This thesis will do both of these things, making an original conceptual contribution to knowledge through the creation of a standalone classification of pre-parliamentary political experience, and making an additional empirical advance by analysing original data to highlight the fact that different types of pre-parliamentary political experience have differential impacts on career paths. This review also generates hypotheses, outlined here, which will guide the forthcoming analysis.

1. That in addition to factors that are traditionally considered in analyses of parliamentary career progression, pre-parliamentary political experience has explanatory power, both statistically and qualitatively.

2. That MPs with national-level political experience are more likely to progress to frontbench positions.
3. That MPs with locally-focused political experience are more likely to remain backbenchers for the duration of their time in parliament.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have located the thesis in relation to existing relevant literatures. I opened the chapter by identifying three broad research foci across the existing literature on political careers; first, identifying the social and occupational backgrounds of MPs; second, investigating the candidate selection processes of political parties; and third, accounting for the intra-parliamentary behaviour of parliamentarians. These three foci were then adopted to provide a structure for the literature review within the chapter. In this review, I considered each of these three areas of existing scholarship in turn. Building on the main research questions of the thesis that were identified in the introduction, I have shown that no existing work answers these research questions in a complete fashion.

Overall, the existing literature provides a basis for the work of this thesis, but does not provide a clear answer to the research questions presented in the introduction. I contribute to this literature in an original fashion in two ways; firstly, by presenting a classification of political experience as a standalone category, not subsumed into occupation; and secondly, by demonstrating that this classification can be empirically borne out, linking the study of pre-parliamentary experience and post-election parliamentary careers for the first time. Existing work does, however, provide fodder for some tentative hypotheses relating to these research questions, and these are presented at the close of the chapter, with it posited that there will indeed be an effect on career trajectory related to pre-parliamentary political experience.

In chapter two, I develop the theoretical basis of the thesis, specifically extending the discussion of how to classify different types of political experience seen in the first section of this chapter. I argue that it is possible to see political experience as gained on either the local or national level. I support this distinction with examples from the existing literature before operationalising it empirically in chapter three.

Chapter Two – Theorising the link between political experience and political careers

In the previous chapter I introduced the body of literature on which this thesis will be based – on political careers and personnel in the UK, political recruitment to the House of Commons, and the parliamentary activity and careers of MPs once elected. In this chapter I build on my review of the literature to develop a more holistic theory of why political experience firstly needs to be considered as a stand-alone category, not a subset of occupation, secondly that not all political experience is the same, and thirdly, that there is a strong case in favour of arguing that political experience is likely to impact upon overall political career trajectory. It is in these distinctions and contentions that part of the original scholarly contribution of the thesis lies, and in this chapter I flesh out the rationale for the research by addressing the question of why would there be a link between political experience and political career trajectory?

I begin with a more developed examination of the existing literature on the occupational and political backgrounds of MPs by applying the existing brokerage-instrumental framework to available data. This highlights the benefits and shortcomings of such an approach. Applying the existing framework, I argue it provides two main pieces of information about British politics; that the House of Commons is largely homogeneous in terms of occupational backgrounds, being comprised of individuals from ‘brokerage’ occupations, but also that there has been a shift towards professionalisation and a rise in the number of MPs entering parliament with experience of working in politics, although this group is still in the minority. However, two limitations of this framework are also noted; firstly that it homogenises descriptions of political experience, placing different types of political experience in one overarching category, and secondly that it doesn’t consider the relationship of pre-parliamentary characteristics to post-election career paths. I build on these limitations and argue that political experience should be considered as separate from occupation when considering the pre-parliamentary backgrounds of MPs.

Moving on from this analysis, I ask why it is reasonable to presume a link between political experience gained prior to being elected to the Commons and the career path of an MP following said election? Addressing this question, I delineate between various benefits that

different types of political experience will provide an aspirant parliamentary candidate with. I also discuss the ways in which these benefits are likely to play out both pre- and post-election to the Commons, mapping on to a distinction between political experience gained on the local level, for example as a local councillor, and that gained on the national level, such as working for an MP or in the head office of a political party. Drawing on existing work and evidence, I make the case that political experience is indeed highly likely to influence career trajectory in the Commons. Concluding on this point, I lay the conceptual ground for the empirical analysis which follows in subsequent chapters.

The existing classification - political experience as occupation

Studies of routes into parliament are numerous in the existing literature, both academic and non-academic, ranging from popular general accounts focusing on notions of personal ambition and driven by individual exemplars (Riddell 1993; Osborne 2007) to feminist accounts which look at the candidate selection process in a more systematic and institutionalist way (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997). Attention rarely strays from how traditionally underrepresented groups fare in their attempts to become MPs, and this framing of the issue of parliamentary recruitment, candidacy and representation as one of (in)equality is common (Durose et al. 2011; Durose et al. 2012). In short, the question addressed is one of why individuals with certain characteristics fare better than others in political environments, namely when contending selection for parliamentary candidacy.

As noted in chapter one, the basic contention of these accounts is that an increasing number of MPs work in or around politics prior to being elected to the House of Commons, something identified as a ‘professionalisation’ of sorts (Cairney 2007).¹⁴ Existing accounts of this professionalisation have tended to use the paid employment of MPs before their

¹⁴ It is worth noting here that the terminology in this area is inconsistently used and can be rather confusing. For some, professionalization can be taken as the time at which ‘politicians seized the opportunity to make politics not only their pastime but their job’ (Borchert, 2003, p.7). For others, it means that MPs have worked in politics prior to their election, something not mutually exclusive from this other definition, but decidedly different in scope. More widely, professionalisation has myriad uses, for example describing the way in which an occupation is carried out (Fisher and Webb, 2003).

election to measure its growth¹⁵. That is, *political* experience (in occupational form) is considered alongside all other occupations, not as a part of a stand-alone political experience categorisation.

To reiterate the brief outline of the ways in which the literature deals with occupational experience, classifications of pre-parliamentary occupation initially distinguished between jobs that are considered useful for or conducive to someone running for parliament, and those that are not. These two broad categories allow for little in the way of subtlety or nuance. Paul Cairney argues that this all-encompassing ‘politics-facilitating’ classification of pre-parliamentary occupations that are broadly favourable to an individual considering a run for parliament is outdated and no longer of great use (2007). He posits a distinction between ‘brokerage’ and ‘instrumental’ with the former being a job that is conducive to running for political office whereas the latter is perceived to ‘be of value as an aid to election’, and building on the ‘politics-facilitating’ label by distinguishing between occupations conducive to office and those with a direct link to politics (2007, p.6). As noted previously, the basis of this conduciveness lies in the resources (financial, temporal, and social) offered by such occupations. The brokerage-instrumental distinction is laid out with examples in figure 2.1.

¹⁵ Within the literature, this is measured in different ways, with some research focusing on ‘formative’ occupations and others focusing on occupation directly prior to the election. This is another way in which focusing on occupation alone is problematic, with the possibility that empirical analysis ignores less notable, but potentially politically significant, sections of an individual’s career.

BROKERAGE <i>Conducive to politics</i>	INSTRUMENTAL <i>Direct link to politics</i>
Law (Barrister, Solicitor) Teaching Academic 'Professional' more broadly Business	Journalism Public Relations Trade Union official Interest Group representative Full-time Councillor MEP/MSP/AM Party worker Parliamentary staff QUANGO staff Think-tank staff

Figure 2.1 Brokerage and Instrumental occupations defined in Cairney, 2007.

Within the instrumental category, Cairney includes journalism, 'occupations that provide an apprenticeship for higher elected office', or those that entail working closely with existing politicians, as well as mentioning individuals who pursue their duties as elected local councillors on a full-time basis (2007, pp.215-217). These individuals are broadly considered to be the archetypal professional politicians. This is typical of the way that a number of separate lines of enquiry are often conflated under the label of 'professionalisation'. For example:

...reflected in, and strongly reinforced by, the increasing number of MPs who had previously been local councillors and/or worked for their party or a campaigning group – in short, career politicians (Rush and Giddings 2011, p.235).

This account, characteristic of many in this area, conflates a number of significantly different factors into a homogenous and all-encompassing 'career politician' label. By doing this, researchers obscure the differences that may exist between these different types of pre-parliamentary political experience. This matters especially in an era when political experience can be both paid and unpaid, can be both a full-time job and experiential, or in some cases is very much something pursued in addition to a non-political full-time job. Some of the roles listed are available only to those who have successfully competed in an

election of some sort, others see individuals in the employ of an actual political party (and therefore presumably working in a partisan capacity), whereas others are instead more generalised, political in a broader non-partisan sense. The discussion of 'professionalisation', as detailed above in both the schema of Cairney and others, can take us only so far in addressing questions of political experience. The professionalisation thesis is mainly interested in how politicians are increasingly already heavily-involved in political life by the time of their election in the form of full-time paid work. This account conflates a number of activities together when assembling evidence to support or refute whether this is occurring or not. This issue will be returned to later in the chapter, where I argue that a stand-alone focus on political experience rectifies this issue. This can also be linked to the normative justification for interest in this subject outlined in the introduction. There I argued that the domination of elite political roles by those with similar types of pre-parliamentary political experience would have an exclusionary effect, giving politics the appearance of a closed shop, open only to a small section of the population. An increase in the number of MPs with solely political experience gives an appearance of them having no 'normal' experience. In turn, this paints the political as *abnormal*, increasing the notional distance between the representative and the represented (Voet 1992).

As noted in the previous chapter, the occupational background of MPs has been a long-held fascination for scholars of MPs, Parliament, and elections (Mellors 1978; Rush 1994; Jun 2003), but classificatory schema are inconsistently applied. The following section of this chapter will apply the brokerage-instrumental distinction to the available data on post-war parliaments prior to highlighting both what we can learn from utilising this approach, and conversely, what we cannot.

Applying the existing classification

Between 1945 and 1979, parliament contained high numbers of MPs with professional occupational backgrounds. Some 40.8% of all MPs across the 29 years had occupational experience as barristers, solicitors, doctors, civil servants, and members of the teaching profession (Mellors 1978, p.61). This is a figure largely consistent across the then two main parties, with only a .3% difference between Conservative and Labour numbers in this category (40.4% and 40.7% respectively), and 45.1% of the 83 MPs elected from other parties had a similar background. In his account of this era, Colin Mellors is clear, however, that these statistics should not be seen as denoting a convergence of MPs from the two

parties, as to do so would muddy some clear intra- and inter-party differences (1978, p.80). The main sources of data here are Colin Mellors' *The British MP* (1978) and *The British General Election* series (Criddle 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005; Cracknell 2010; Criddle 2010), and the classification of brokerage and instrumental occupations seen in figure 2.1.

The Conservative Parliamentary Party

The Conservative party, lacking a tradition of electing ex-manual labourers to the Commons, is dominated by MPs from brokerage backgrounds, a pattern unchanged for the most part since 1945. This is shown in figure 2.2. Manual labourers fall under the code 'N/A', which is neither a brokerage nor instrumental occupation. Of those MPs with brokerage backgrounds, MPs drawn from the world of business are broadly dominant within the parliamentary Conservative party (PCP). Between 1945 and 1974 this was the largest group within the PCP, 41.6% of MPs in this period having a business background. This is over three times more than Labour over the same time period (Mellors 1978, p.61).

Within the professions, the Conservatives are dominated by lawyers, specifically barristers, who make up between 15 and 20% of all Conservative MPs at any of the ten elections in this period (Mellors 1978, p.60). Mellors notes that this means not only are the number of Conservative MPs who were lawyers higher than their Labour counterparts, but they also tended to achieve a higher position within the profession. Linked to this is some evidence that barristers tended to get better Conservative seats (1978, p.60). Even within the brokerage category, there is variation across the two main political parties, with the Conservatives more likely to have MPs with private sector experience and Labour those who have worked in the public sector, a distinction masked, at least in part, by the brokerage-instrumental classification.

MPs with a military background are also more prominent in the PCP than the parliamentary Labour party (PLP) in this period, although they are very much a dwindling group by the 1970s (Mellors 1978, p.61). Another group whose representation on the Conservative benches declined throughout this era were farmers, who made up only 8.1% of MPs following the October 1974 election.

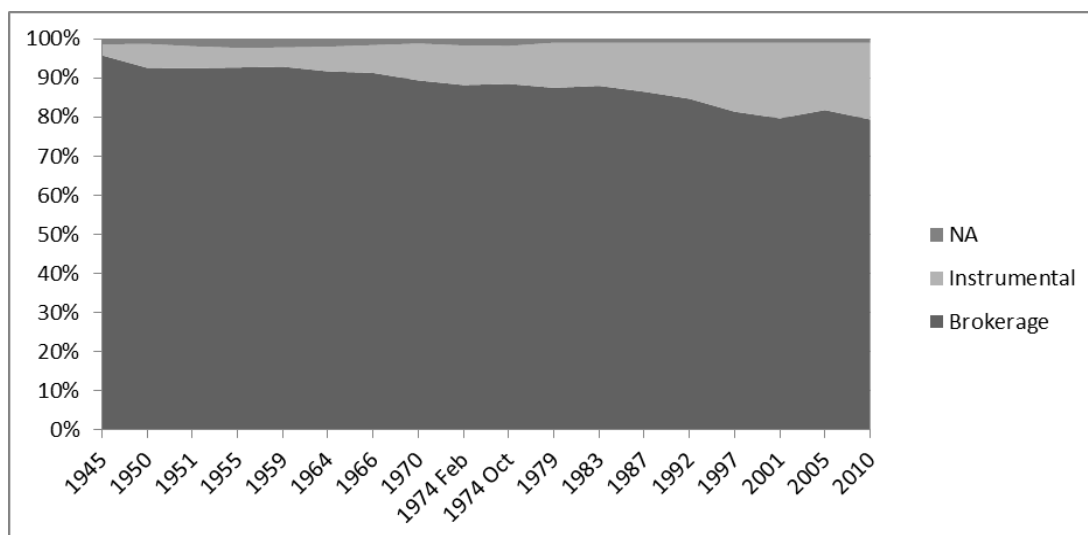


Figure 2.2 Conservative MPs by Occupational Background (1945-2010), Adapted from (Mellors 1978), and the British General Election Series (Criddle 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010; McGuinness 2010).

The largest single occupation represented on the Conservative benches between 1945 and 1974 is business, with many MPs coming directly to the Commons from company directorships (Mellors 1978, p.71). Business was clearly the rock on which the Conservative parliamentary party, and indeed the leadership, was built (Mellors 1978, p.73). The shift towards business away from the professions and indeed other roles such as farming was not as marked as the changes occurring in the Labour party at the same time, but there is what Mellors describes as a 'subtle re-drawing' that should not be ignored (1978, p.74). For example, following the 1945 general election, almost half (46.5%) of Conservative MPs were from the professions, a figure which had fallen over ten per cent to 35% by 1974. At the same time, the percentage of Conservative MPs with business experience saw growth at almost the exact same rate, rising from 36% in 1945 to 46% in 1974.

The parliamentary trends of the Conservative parliamentary party post-1979 are in many ways quite similar to those in the Labour party, but there are still a number of key differences that should be drawn out. Cairney notes the large difference in the numbers of MPs with legal backgrounds on the Conservative and Labour benches respectively, despite the overall convergence of the two parties on those MPs with professional backgrounds broadly defined (2007, p.13). The presence of those involved in business continues to grow, with them making up 52.4% of the 1992 cohort and just over 40% of the 2010 intake (Rush 1994, p.572; Cairney 2007, p.15; McGuinness 2010). More than anything else, such results

suggest a continued stability of the trends seen within the party in the period following the Second World War.

The steady growth of instrumental backgrounds amongst Conservative MPs since 1945 is notable. Beginning as a trickle, this group have expanded to become a significant minority within the PCP in recent years. Lacking the trade union officer background of the PLP, the Conservative instrumental cohort has been drawn partly from the long-standing Conservative Research Department (CRD), a breeding-ground for numerous key figures within the party. Until 1979 the CRD was separate from the Conservative Central Office (CCO), in terms of both location and, at times, leadership. This changed under Margaret Thatcher, and the CRD has since been housed within CCO.¹⁶ As Tim Bale highlights in his account of the party between the early 1990s and the current day, the CRD has been a training ground for leading Tories including David Cameron, George Osborne, Steve Hilton, and Andrew Lansley amongst others. Many join the CRD ‘just after university, going on to work as special advisers’, then leaving politics before returning later, often as MPs (Bale 2010, p.13). Looking at figure 2.2., the increased growth in the percentage of MPs with instrumental backgrounds in the late 1980s and early 1990s could perhaps be linked back to the centralisation of the CRD. This centralisation made the CRD even more a part of the policy-making and political machinery of the party at that time, holding a key role in the production of the 1992, and other, general election manifestos (Clark and Kelly 2004; Bale 2010, p.100).¹⁷ Think-tanks played a similar role for the Party in the Thatcher era, primarily the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute. Barnes and Cockett write that these think-tanks ‘filled a void not being filled by the existing party machinery’, particularly with regard to promoting the free-market approach so favoured by Thatcher (Barnes and Cockett 1994, pp.380-381). The proliferation of these bodies, and other venues (such as Thatcher’s Policy Unit and the Conservative Political Centre) provided a number of possible roles for those aspirant parliamentary candidates from which to gain instrumental political experience. Thus in many ways, the growth in number of MPs with such experience is partly a reflection of changes external to the Commons but still within the Party itself as well as the wider Westminster bubble. Although there are currently a higher percentage of

¹⁶ <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/cpa/cco/crd.html>

¹⁷ A fuller history of the CRD is available in Clark and Kelly (2004), or in Barnes, J. & Cockett, R. 1994. *The Making of Party Policy*. pp.348-382. In: Seldon, A. & Ball, S. (eds.) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Labour MPs with instrumental experience than Conservative, the consistent rise in the proportion of Tory MPs with such experience is notable.

The Parliamentary Labour Party

The backgrounds of those in the parliamentary Labour party (PLP) between 1945 and 2010 are more varied than those of the Conservatives. The shift in the nature of the backgrounds of the PLP between 1945 to 1974 is significantly more marked than seen in the Conservatives. Mellors characterises the shift as one from ‘men of toil to men of ideas’ (1978, p.74), with a clear pattern of professionals (mainly teachers), displacing manual workers. Alongside this shift, there is relative stability in numbers of MPs with business and other occupational backgrounds, from journalists and political workers to policemen or pilots (Mellors 1978, p.74).

Figure 2.3 suggests an increase in the percentage of the PLP with backgrounds classified neither as brokerage nor instrumental, most likely manual labour backgrounds, in 1979. Potentially, this increase reflects the political shift to the left of the ideological spectrum that the party took in this era, however, caution is advised when interpreting this data. When coding the available data, I used two main sources; Mellors’ account which covered 1945-74, and then the various ‘candidates’ chapters written for *The British General Election* series by Byron Criddle. The first election for which I utilised the latter was 1979 – thus, there is potential for this sudden increase to be the result of the shift in source material, perhaps by the coding differences of the two authors, rather than an actual change on the ground. Speculatively, I think this could have root in the ways the respective authors coded those MPs who had been manual workers but also representatives of trade unions – the latter role is arguably ‘instrumental’, the former neither instrumental nor brokerage. Regardless, the subsequent decrease in the percentage of MPs with this background still tells a story of decline; the decline of MPs with backgrounds in manual work in the modern Labour party. Additionally, the figures for all parties were drawn from the same source at each time point, thus making comparisons across party consistent regardless of changes in coding over time.

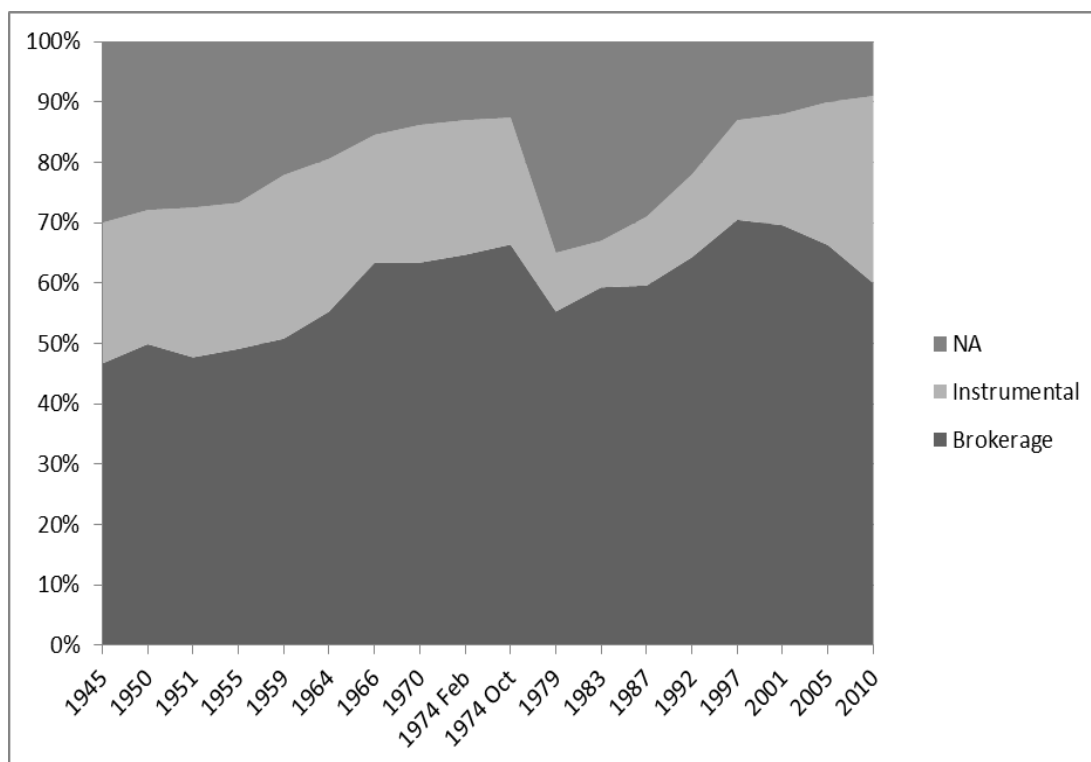


Figure 2.3 Labour MPs by Occupational Background (1945-2010), Adapted from (Mellors 1978), and the British General Election Series (Criddle 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010; McGuinness 2010).

In Figure 2.3, the group 'NA' consists largely of manual workers, this type of occupational experience not falling into either the instrumental or brokerage categories, and it is clear that within the PLP, this group has fluctuated in size since 1945. As noted above, there may be some discrepancies in measurement, but in any case, the story since the 1980s has been one of decline, with the size of this group reducing markedly, particularly in the past decade, to a record low in 2010. By the 2005 general election, only 9% of Labour MPs had backgrounds in manual labour occupations, with only one new MP at that election having such a background. The prominence of teachers on the Labour benches is notable, becoming the biggest single occupational group amongst the party's MPs post-1992 (Cairney 2007, p.5). Mellors attributes such predominance to generational class shifts amongst the population, whilst Norris and Lovenduski point out that the benefits of such brokerage positions are practical – flexible, long-term careers, significant vacation breaks, and so on (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Yvonne Galligan, writing about the Irish Republic, points out the benefits of being, for example, a teacher or nurse in terms of the potential recognition it would offer a candidate within the local community (Galligan 2007).

One clear point of distinction between the Labour party and the Conservatives is the sheer variety of occupational backgrounds found in the PLP. The Conservatives were dominated by business and the professions throughout this time, whereas Labour have a clear split along the four lines of professionals, business, workers, and then miscellaneous backgrounds (Mellors 1978, p.74). As well as the variation in overall groupings, there is more variety within each group than is seen in the Conservative figures. For example, within the professional category, in contrast to the dominance of the law in the Conservative party, the older professions are balanced by more modern occupations such as teaching, something that Mellors sees as a product of social mobility amongst the working class (Mellors 1978, p.76). He goes on to distinguish between two types of professional within the party, those of 'the established middle class and those who have transferred from one class to the next higher social class' (Mellors 1978, p.76), with the increase in the numbers of the latter group resulting in the high numbers of Labour MPs with professional backgrounds. Comparing the numbers of teachers and manual workers on the Labour benches, there is almost a parallel shift in favour of the former (Mellors 1978, p.77).

Labour has a longer tradition of returning MPs with instrumental experience than the Conservative party, primarily thanks to a group uniquely represented on the Labour benches: trade union officials. Such individuals tend to be elected later in life and will rarely achieve frontbench status, although they will often occupy very safe seats. Labour returned 98 trade union officials to the Commons throughout the period 1945-74, making up 5.6% of all MPs returned in this time (Mellors 1978, p.62). Since, then this percentage has broadly increased, and as of the 2010 general election, MPs with instrumental backgrounds comprise 31% of the PLP. How has this occurred? Fisher and Webb, discussing the growth of party staffs (a key component of the instrumental category), note that 'party employees may well be becoming more important in the overall composition of (political) parties' (Fisher and Webb 2003, p.167). This is both the case for Labour and the Conservatives. The key trend to highlight within the PLP in this period is the marked rise of ex-political workers being elected, with them composing 16.9% of the PLP following the 2005 general election, a rise from 4.8% in 1979. Other occupations have overwhelmingly stable representation within the PLP, with most shifts being limited to less than 5% either way. Broadly, there were increases in the number of solicitors but a very slight fall in the high numbers of teachers as well as a fall in the number of barristers (Cairney 2007, p.11).

The Liberal Democrats

Since 1983, a liberal party of some description has been the third-largest party at Westminster, reaching a peak of 62 MPs following the 2005 general election. However, in contrast to the Labour and Conservative parties, the party lacks a distinct social base and thus does not have obvious roots in occupations such as manual labour and business respectively.

Accordingly, the Lib Dems lie somewhere in between the two larger parties in terms of the occupational background of their MPs. Since 1983, they have had almost no MPs who have occupational experience as manual labourers, this category comprising a maximum of 2% of their MPs over the last 30 years. Over the same time period, the parliamentary party was largely dominated by those MPs with occupational backgrounds in the professions, although this percentage has declined from around 60% of (the considerably smaller) intakes of 1987 and 1992, to around 40% at the two most recent election (2005 & 2010). There has been a similar fluctuation in the proportion of Lib Dem MPs with business backgrounds, this figure rising from 12% in 1987 to a peak of 29% in 2005, before dropping again to 19% in 2010. The miscellaneous category makes up between 24% and 40% over this time period, with 20% of the 2010 intake specifically having backgrounds as politicians or political organisers.

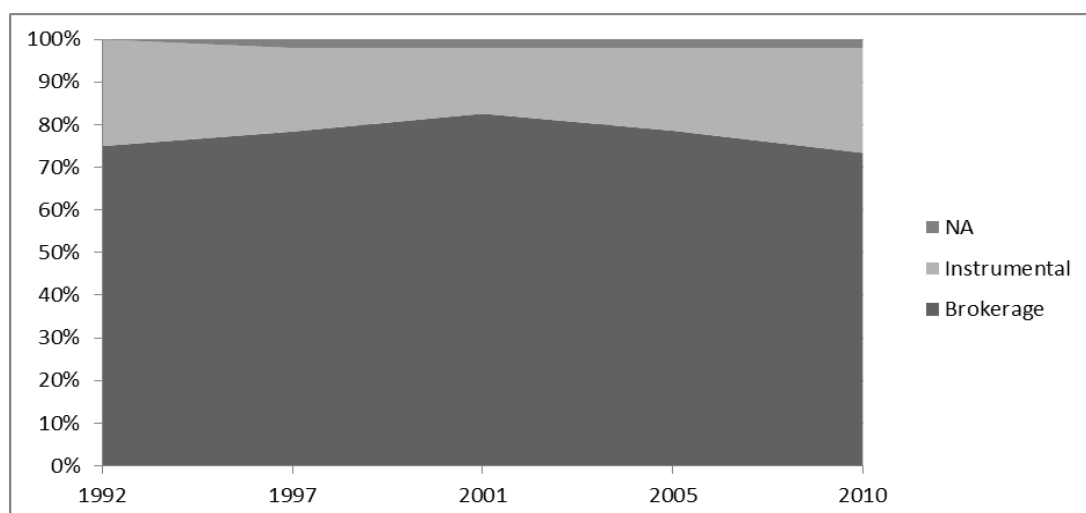


Figure 2.4 Liberal Democrat MPs by Occupational Background (1992-2010), Adapted from the British General Election Series (Criddle 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010; McGuinness 2010).

Again, the Liberal Democrats are a halfway house of sorts between Labour and the Conservatives, having more MPs with business backgrounds than the former but fewer than the latter, and vice versa with regard to MPs with occupational experience of manual labour. As the size of the intake has grown, the representation of business experience amongst Lib Dem MPs has grown, reaching its peak in 2005 with 29% of their 62 MPs. Applying the logic of a normal curve, one would expect that this is, in many ways, the 'true' party shining through thanks to the larger sample of MPs. And in many ways, as noted above, their location in terms of occupational experience is to be expected, with the Liberal Democrats occupying a similar middle-ground ideologically. As with the other two parties, instrumental occupations are well-represented on the Lib Dem benches, comprising almost 25% of their 2010 parliamentary intake. This figure is higher and lower than the equivalent for the Conservatives and Labour respectively.

When making a cross-party comparison of occupational trends amongst MPs since 1979, it is perhaps the continuing stability of the trends seen prior to the late 1970s that is most striking. By and large, brokerage experience is the norm amongst MPs in the Commons, although there are party differences within this category. The Conservative party remains dominated by MPs with backgrounds in business, whereas Labour has a more professional, teaching-oriented, parliamentary party.

Perhaps the only major shift has been the increase in instrumental occupational experience across all parties, this group comprising 31% of Labour MPs, 20% of Conservatives, and 25% of Lib Dems following the 2010 general election. Although nowhere near a majority, this group is now a notable minority of parliament. However, applying this classification of brokerage and instrumental to the available data can only take us so far. As noted above, this data is drawn from the work of Mellors (1978) and Criddle (1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2010), and I have adapted their coding of political occupations into a brokerage-instrumental split. The primary category which comprises the 'instrumental' category is 'politician/political worker', and there are two points to first make about the way in which this category might have been understood by the authors, and subsequently coded. Firstly, it includes 'politicians', and thus may well incorporate MPs who have previously sat in devolved bodies, or who were full-time local councillors. Secondly, it is unclear what the 'political organiser' classification involves precisely, although it is probably safe to assume

that this includes many of the positions discussed in chapter one, such as parliamentary assistants, constituency organisers, central party office staff, and so on (Webb and Fisher 2003). In any case, and regardless of the exact assessment criteria, these categories remain sparsely populated, leaving the majority of MPs with no experience in such roles (Cowley 2012).

How have these findings been utilised and what can they tell us?

The classification above, as part of a wider body of work (outlined in chapter one) which looks at questions of who, in socioeconomic terms, our MPs are and where they come from has two broad key findings;

1. That most MPs have backgrounds in brokerage occupations

The literature detailed above finds that politics is dominated by MPs who have backgrounds in brokerage occupations – for the Labour party, this means a majority of MPs who have broadly ‘professional’ backgrounds, often in the public sector, and for the Conservatives, MPs who have worked in private sector business (Jun 2003). Again using occupation as a proxy measure of social class, it is concluded that parliament has seen a shift to dominance by a majority of highly-educated middle-class politicians, with outliers to this trend (working class Labour MPs and aristocratic Conservative MPs) relegated to the periphery since the 1970s (Jun 2003; Cairney 2007).

This shift has also been linked to the changing age of the Commons; King posits that many career politicians will be first elected between the age of thirty and forty-five, contrasting this with the small numbers of MPs first elected after the age of fifty (1983, p.263). More generally, it is found that Westminster has become a younger legislature since the 1970s, perhaps due to changing expectations relating to pre-parliamentary experience as part of the spread of careerism (Best et al. 2001, p.86).

2. That there is a growing minority of MPs who have held instrumental occupations

Although dominated by MPs from brokerage occupational backgrounds, the Commons has seen a growth in the number of MPs with instrumental occupational experience. There has been a proliferation of adjunct roles around the key political institutions. Many of the analyses of the trends examined here centred on the notion of a political class or career politicians (King 1983; Riddell 1993; Jun 2003). The political class thesis can be broadly

defined as the idea that many new MPs are 'career politicians who [have] spent their whole occupational lives in politics' (Jun 2003, p.169). Jun writes;

While MPs are at the center of the political class, the group also includes the growing numbers of political consultants, political advisors to ministers, research assistants to MPs, as well as the staff at party headquarters, in the House of Commons, and in policy research institutes working for the parties. To this list should also be added lobbyists working for interest organizations. On the regional and local level the class includes the members of newly established legislatures and assemblies, their staff and political advisors, and the growing number of professional councillors and members of local government. The last of these groups increasingly constitutes the pool of recruitment for the lower House of Parliament (Jun 2003, p.170).

There is a general theme in this literature, and more popular (or populist) versions of it, that politicians are increasingly close to the political system *before* they are elected. Rush identifies three overarching trends. First, early engagement, both occupational and financial, with politics as a precondition to pursuing a political career; second, a decline in individuals who become MPs following a successful non-political career, and thirdly, the 'professionalisation' of politics, marked by an increase in MPs salaries and the providing of the resources necessary to do their jobs effectively (Rush 1994, p.576). In addition, it is possible to highlight other trends, such as serving in parliament for longer, with most MPs serving for at least fifteen years (Rush 1994, p.571) and being initially elected at a younger age.

Anthony King's analysis provides a wide-ranging discussion of the idea of a career politician, beginning with an observation that 'a lot is known about the social background of politicians. Perhaps it is time to learn more about their social foreground' (King 1983, p. 249). King's argument is clear – that career politicians have come to dominate the top roles in British politics and government. For King, the career politician is someone who is 'committed to politics', 'regards politics as his vocation' and who seeks fulfilment in politics, sees his future in it, and would be 'deeply upset if circumstances forced him to retire' from it (1983, p. 250). Utilising individual case studies with data drawn from limited quantitative sources as well as political biography, King paints a picture of the rise of the

career politician in British politics in the post-war era. Turning to the consequences of this development, he posits that it will be ever harder for an individual without significant political experience to reach the upper echelons of political life, that this will lead to an intensification of the 'village atmosphere at Westminster, and that parliament as a whole will see an increase in the ambition of its Members (1983, pp. 276-280).

Accounts such as that offered by Peter Riddell (1993) offer qualitative evidence of increasing numbers of MPs who harboured parliamentary ambitions since their student days and have known 'nothing else than politics'. An example is the account provided by Labour MP Sadiq Khan, quoted in the introductory chapter of this thesis (Riddell 1993, p.186; Mullinger 2011). Jun describes these conclusions as 'overdrawn', but acknowledges the declining proportion of MPs coming into parliament from non-political backgrounds. It should be noted that although this figure is in decline, it is not the case that prospective MPs are leaving school or university and simply strolling into a parliamentary seat as would have been the case in the eighteenth century (Rush 1994, p.573; Jun 2003). Indeed, the large proportion of MPs being elected for the first time in their thirties would suggest that some sort of occupation prior to seeking election is the norm (Rush 1994, p.576).

What can they not tell us?

Despite the core findings outlined above, this literature is lacking in two main ways. Primarily, the classification of brokerage and instrumental ignores the significant differences between, for example, working at Westminster in an MPs' office and being a local councillor in the North of England. By utilising data focusing on occupation to diagnose a proximity that is essentially *political*, this work provides no counterpoint to the rise of MPs with instrumental experience. Realistically, the natural opposite, and a more useful comparator, to someone working full-time in national level politics is not a lawyer, or teacher, or businessman. I argue below that it is more fruitful to consider political experience as a stand-alone category, and to delineate between local- and national-level political experience, the latter embodied in these instrumental roles.

Secondly, this literature provides only a muddled answer to the question of 'so what?' It does not use the data it has to ask whether such patterns have consequences for the individuals in question following their election to the House of Commons. In chapter one, I argued that there is a strong theoretical case, largely borne of the representation

literature, that these questions matter. In the rest of the thesis, I will show that there are practical implications, that these patterns *do* affect the career trajectories of MPs in the Commons, and argue that this is something that should both interest and potentially concern political scientists. Rather than looking solely at how these characteristics affect pre-election patterns of recruitment and success at the ballot box, I will track their relationship with post-election career paths within parliament.

A distinct classification of political experience

There are two strands to the original contribution made by this thesis to the study of political careers, and I discuss both in this section. Firstly, political experience should be considered as a stand-alone concept when studying the pre-parliamentary lives of MPs. Secondly, I utilise this new conceptual framework to go further than previous studies in the field and link the pre-parliamentary political experience of MPs with their intra-parliamentary careers, thus providing original, new, findings regarding a previously unmeasured phenomenon.

The brokerage-instrumental distinction, as outlined and operationalised above, acts as a useful delineator of different types of occupations, and allows for broader trends to be identified than is possible when looking at specific occupational types. However, although the classification allows us to chart the increase in MPs with instrumental occupational experience, this is placed in isolation. That is, it is not charted against anything else. The brokerage-instrumental distinction, as noted in chapter one, grew out of an interest in parliamentary candidacy, out of questions regarding *who* ran for parliament, and *why*; what made them more able to do so than others? Over time, however, the classification has been used to address other issues, namely the composition of parliament and what this composition means in terms of the relationship between the representatives and those they are sent to the Commons to represent. The primary theme of the responses to these issues has been that politicians are becoming professionalised, using politics as a career, and doing so earlier than before (with the assumption, sometimes implicit, sometimes not, that this is a bad thing). However, this classification of brokerage and instrumental doesn't provide the detail necessary to understand fully this phenomenon, these changes in the pre-parliamentary political lives of politicians.

At heart, what is being measured by the instrumental category is politics and the political; that is, experience of the political world prior to election. Subsuming such experience as an offshoot of occupation underplays the complexity of this situation. In particular, it masks the huge number of MPs with local council experience or other local-level experience that is not occupational in nature. Within the classification, although council experience is partially included, it is only included on a full-time basis, despite the majority of councillors still pursuing their council duties alongside other occupations. Additionally, for many other individuals, the primary involvement with politics prior to election will be on a local scale, at the constituency level. As such, when coded, this kind of experience is likely to be missed, as it is unrelated to occupation. I argue that the natural comparator of national-level instrumental occupational experience isn't non-political occupational experience, but rather local-level experience. I will argue here that political experience deserves consideration as a stand-alone factor in these types of coding schema, and the subsequent analysis of them. I will argue a theoretical case grounded in existing literature in this chapter prior to outlining in chapter three how I will construct my own study and measurements of this phenomenon.

The utility of political experience – the local and the national

Studies of political careers identify trends in pre-parliamentary occupational experience, but beyond a basic interpretation (that some jobs provide resources making them more conducive to political candidacy than others), fail to interrogate exactly *what* is offered by these routes into the Commons. This gives rise to two main considerations. Firstly; *what* is it about these political apprenticeships that make them exactly that, providing those who undertake them the skills necessary to become (relatively) successful politicians? Secondly; *when* are these things useful within a political career – pre- or post-election?

In previous research which explores why some local councillors are more likely to consider a run for parliamentary office than others, it has been proposed that political apprenticeships consist, essentially, of three components; (1) an understanding of the formal processes of politics in terms of institutional structures and official behavioural norms; (2) the development of informal social contacts and networks, an understanding of what goes on behind the formal institutional structures (Allen 2012); and (3) a more

abstract demonstration of loyalty to both party and constituency (or locality). In reality, the first two facets will be closely intertwined (for example, in the subversion of arcane legislative procedure to achieve a given aim) and hard to untangle. However, for the purposes of understanding the utility of political experience to prospective parliamentary candidates in a more systematic manner, it is helpful. As such, this three-way distinction will be referred to throughout the following section.

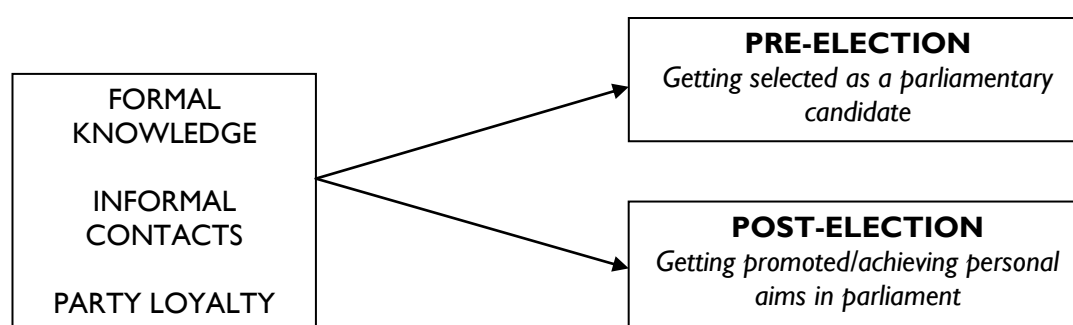


Figure 2.5 Benefits of pre-parliamentary political experience at different stages of a political career

There is a long-standing tradition in Britain of MPs cutting their political teeth at the local council level prior to moving on to national-level political positions. The question of why local councils play such a prominent role in the careers of many parliamentarians in Britain is largely unaddressed in the existing local government or political recruitment literature, perhaps because it is deemed too obvious or too simple a question to warrant serious discussion. Post-election, having been a local councillor is of obvious benefit. Thinking in terms of the practical utility of a formal training in how to 'do politics' following an individuals' election to the Commons, retired Labour MP Christine McCafferty remembers the early days of the new parliament following the 1997 election:

...all the new intake, mostly Labour, were 22 to a room on the upper committee corridor because there were no rooms to put us in. With one telephone between 22. In that room, you quickly saw who had been on a local authority. You knew all the councillors of all the parties, knew all the chief execs of all the local organisation, knew absolutely everybody. I found that other people, and I won't name names because they are people who I admire and who are very good MPs, but I can tell you, in that first eight weeks, they didn't know what they were doing (Elliott 2010).

Local council experience is also likely to have utility in the pre-election, even pre-selection, phase. In the literature review, the demonstration of party loyalty (Rush 1994, p.573) and localism (Childs and Cowley 2011) were noted as potential explanations for the prominence of local council experience. There is no formal role for local government in the candidate selection process – parties are not obliged to choose local councillors to be their MPs, local councillors are not required to run in any selection, and there is nothing compelling local councillors to show any interest whatsoever in the selection of a parliamentary candidate for their constituency if they do not wish to. This lack of a formal role obscures the fact that the presence of local politicians is strongly felt in the candidate selection processes. Similar caveats apply for those involved in local politics in a non-elected fashion, as what can be termed ‘party foot soldiers’. These individuals generally undertake unglamorous tasks for no pay, such as knocking on doors to canvass votes, delivering leaflets, and attending constituency party meetings (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley and Seyd 2002).

Throughout their study of the candidate selection processes of British political parties, Norris and Lovenduski find evidence of the importance of a number of aspects of the ‘local’. Firstly, there is an emphasis on a local candidate, particularly within the Labour party, although this is markedly less of a norm within the Conservative party with candidates applying to multiple seats across the country (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.23). It is also argued that the UK electoral system, first past the post, contributes to the localism of the system by strengthening the link between an MP and their constituency. Across all three main parties, local party organisations hold the key roles in selecting candidates, and generally also the final word (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.7). As previously mentioned, it is well-contended in the literature that the political character of each party is reflected in the nature of their candidate selection process. As such, the Labour party process values local loyalty among candidates, for example, above those candidates who have applied to multiple constituencies (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.54; Ware 1996). They also note that the Labour process is still one dominated by patronage:

But in many safe seats the Labour party system, despite the detailed rule book, is essentially one where informal local patronage remains important. What matters, still, is who you know in these constituencies (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.54).

This notion of 'being known' in the constituency being a bonus in the selection process is something that can be linked to local political service. Local councillors, and other local political operatives, will be ideally placed to build networks of contacts and to raise a significant public profile amongst the wider population. The authors are keen to emphasise, however, the key party difference here, with the Conservatives placing more emphasis on the concept of 'meritocracy', with assessments of candidates focusing on formal qualification and what the authors describe as "'the best chap for the job' irrespective of local origin" (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, pp.54-55).

Candidates will also often have to participate in selection meetings within the constituency with local members, and it is not unusual for local issues to be a key focus of the questioning at such events (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.44). Naturally, this proximity between local party organisations and power over the candidate selection process leaves those individuals with some sort of local profile within a constituency in an advantageous position. Referring back to figure 2.5, having this sort of locally-focused political experience would be a clear pre-election benefit.

There are other less obvious opportunities for a good local knowledge to act as an advantage to a candidate, for example the ability to glean proprietary information regarding forthcoming parliamentary vacancies prior to those not privy to such information (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, p.60). Similar to this process is the natural gravitation towards running also described by some Labour MPs who were local to the seat, who found that over time more and more people suggested to them that they would make a good candidate. These findings are similar to those of Lawless and Fox in the USA as well as preliminary data (collected by the author) which suggests that this applies to British local councillors too (Lawless and Fox 2005; Allen 2012). Such local recognition may also result in a candidate having more cheerleaders for their candidacy within the constituency, also a good thing (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, pp.61-63). The authors note that this was less the case for Conservatives.

The benefit of this local experience, other than a residual knowledge of political process and actors on the local level, is in some ways unclear. For one, it would not appear to act for MPs as an extra power source within their constituency. Vernon Bogdanor writes that in

1889, 87 MPs held parliamentary and local elected seats concurrently. In 2006 this figure was just 18, with 16 of these MPs being newly-elected the previous year and expected to stand down from their council duties shortly (2009, p.240). There is little incentive for MPs to hold this dual mandate of both parliamentarian and councillor, something that is common in France, for example (Murray 2010). Bogdanor argues that this trend can in part be explained by the fact that MPs rarely get elected in areas where they were local councillors. Highlighting how the first-past-the-post electoral system limits the opportunities available to, for example, 'a Labour councillor in Henley or a Conservative councillor in Tower Hamlets', he argues that the system 'makes constituency representation very much a carpet-bagger's charter' (Bogdanor 2009, pp.240-241). Bogdanor posits that MPs are mostly 'rootless', that there is a disconnect between local and national political life, and that these reasons combine to reinforce a widely-held perception of local government as of little use (Bogdanor 2009, pp.241-242).

At the same time, however, it would seem that candidates are increasingly in possession of links to the area in which they are running for election. Childs and Cowley, looking at research conducted by Michael Rush, note a rise in MPs claiming local connections to their constituency, from 24% in 1979 to 45% in 1997, peaking at 48% in 2001 before a slight drop to 46% in 2005 (Childs and Cowley 2011, p.6). Breaking the findings down by party, they find that it is a phenomenon concentrated in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, with very few Conservative MPs claiming local connections (only 9% in 1997). Childs and Cowley are well aware of the problems with this notion of a return to localism. Asking what it means to be local, they write:

Is it dependent on place of birth? Or schooling? Or residence? (And if so, for how long?) Or place of employment? Or service on the local council? Or even, as with some MPs, a dynastic link to a seat that their parents or grandparents previously held? And is it coterminous with the precise borders of the constituency, or with some broader area, such as a city or a region? The 'local' may also mean different things – and with a different intensity – in different parts of a country (Childs and Cowley 2011, pp.6-7).

They also acknowledge that it could be a self-fulfilling prophecy that more candidates have local connections; if such connections are desirable, people will strive ever harder to find them, perhaps at the risk of the link being so tenuous as to become meaningless. This also raises questions of the unique utility of local council experience to an aspirant MP. If it is possible to claim local connections to a seat through increasingly vague familial or occupational means, and it is unlikely that you will be elected in the area in which you serve on a local council, quite simply, why bother? In many ways, it may be simply to offer service to one's political party of choice in a less specific, perhaps even constraining, way. For example, this could be achieved by working for the party on the national level, or perhaps working as an organiser across multiple constituencies.

Hypothetically, it is possible that different types of experience will be more useful at different stages of a political career. Whereas having local council experience is of more obvious utility *prior* to actually (successfully) competing in an election, instrumental experience will leave an individual (now an MP) in better shape following their entry into the Commons. This will be discussed further in chapter six. The idea that there are different 'types' of MPs is not new (Searing 1985), but the idea that this could be either a conscious or unconscious result of their pre-parliamentary political lives is. Thinking about those MPs with instrumental experience compared to their colleagues who cut their political teeth at the local level, they will know different people, different skills, and have different ideas about both what politics is, and it is done. For example, in a 2011 interview, newly-elected MP Luciana Berger said:

The job that I did most recently in the three years running up to standing for parliament, I was working in and around Westminster in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and ... I think it definitely helps to understand Parliament's processes, to understand the physical layout of the building 'cos it took me a good couple of years to work out how to get everywhere, there's lots of nooks and crannies about the place, and just generally understanding how you can use parliament to promote the interests of your constituents. I think, because I had that experience, it's been incredibly helpful (Fairbrother 2011).

Working for the central party, or an affiliated organisation, in the bubble of the Westminster village is likely to give aspirant MPs detailed knowledge of the way that politics in the British parliament is carried out – the geography, the personalities, the language, and the formal and informal methods of getting things done. Herein lies a key distinction between experience gained at the local and national level – the difference between having a knowledge of how politics plays out *locally* versus how one conducts business on the Westminster stage, within the *national* legislature. Drawing from this, it is possible that pre-parliamentary activity is likely to affect post-election activity, for various reasons, no doubt including comfort and familiarity, prowess, and interest. Politicians may well stick to what they know best.

The promotions game within the House of Commons is a difficult one to pin down. Not obviously based on meritocratic principles of any kind, it has been characterised as something of a game of who knows who, requiring good contacts in addition to political acumen. Arguably, instrumental experience puts aspirant MPs in close contact with those already rising to, or already at, the top of political life, providing them with an opportunity to forge relationships that may benefit their careers at a future stage. Former Labour MP Oona King (1997-2005) writes:

Any aspiring MP who wants to be a Government Minister needs to find a power broker. If you haven't got a senior politician, ideally a Cabinet Minister, going to bat for you, you're nowhere. ...if someone isn't banging on the table you *have* to give my boy/girl a break (usually in return for something), well, it just won't happen (King 2007, p.210).

Such benefits are largely intangible, and thus hard to operationalise in research terms. In fact, some of the best insights into what it takes to get into cabinet, and whether or not there are consistent patterns of who does, comes from studies which consider who does *not* make it into cabinet roles that often – women (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, 2009; Krook and O'Brien 2012). Much of this work finds that women, seemingly by virtue of their sex, simply do not gain promotion as often as their male colleagues. This introduces the idea, more explicitly than so far in this thesis, that there is a bias towards certain groups gaining promotion to frontbench roles ahead of others based on such a group membership. Could this membership be based on political experience? Chris Mullin,

a junior minister and previous long-term backbencher throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, writes;

I notice the former special advisers tend to stick together in the Tea Room; some have already developed the short attention spans one associates with the upwardly mobile. Before the year is out they'll all be in government (Mullin 2009, p.187).

The question driving this analysis is that of whether the pre-parliamentary political experience of an MP affects their career trajectory once elected to the Commons? Is there a roadmap of sorts for individuals who wish to reach the top of British politics, namely a frontbench position in either government or opposition, identified by Cowley as a 'two-track career path' (2012, p.36). Is there evidence for this? Existing literature from the 1970s suggests that MPs who have a political background as local councillors are more likely to end up being long-term backbenchers than those MPs who do not share this experience, and that transfer from local to national leadership is rare (Judge 1973; Mellors 1978, p.98). Mellors writes;

But in both parties local government has now become an important factor in parliamentary recruitment. There is, however, one important qualification to this conclusion...such MPs rarely achieve leading positions in their parliamentary party (1978, p.98).

Is it still the case that having been a local councillor is not a boost to frontbench careers? Are local councillors destined to continue their locally-focused work, only now from an office in Westminster? Cowley argues that 'for those who want an accelerated route to the top of the political parties, being a career politician now appears to be the only game in town' (Cowley 2012, p.37). As noted above, the classification of 'career politician' requires disaggregation, but Cowley's point is clear - that political experience has changed, and that there is a group of MPs who have Westminster-based experience prior to their election who benefit from these changes at the expense of those MPs without it:

For sure, this leaves the majority of MPs who enter the Commons without such experience, but it creates the potential for a two-track

career path, with accelerated promotion for those with significant pre-Westminster experience and perhaps a slower route for those without (2012, p.36).

Utilising the distinction between pre- and post-election benefits laid out in figure 2.5, this section of the chapter sets out the argument that pre-parliamentary political experience is not only likely to have an effect at the beginning of a political career, but is likely to leave a legacy that stretches on for the duration of an MP's stay in the Commons. It has been suggested that local council experience is likely to expend most of its benefits to a career in the pre-election phase, possibly easing the path to selection as a prospective parliamentary candidate, but is unlikely to aid an individual in their climb up the slippery slope of frontbench promotions once in the House of Commons. Conversely, instrumental political experience, gained at the national level, may prove beneficial when seeking a seat, but really kicks in once an MP is in the Commons, giving them the requisite contacts and political know-how to make it onto the career ladder, and keep climbing.

Summary and conclusion

It is clear that not all political experience is the same, no longer obtained primarily from locally-based door-knocking or local councillorship. The expansion of parliamentary and party staffs, along with other politically-oriented roles in think-tanks amongst others, has made it possible to obtain political experience as part of a full-time occupation. Also noted above is how the instrumental occupational category, and the professional politician category which it both subsumes and also closely resembles, conflate these divergent sources of political experience into a single, falsely homogenous term. As this category denotes direct political experience, for example in the form of local council experience or paid working experience in a political role, it is important to address ways in which this categorisation can be made more subtle.

Firstly, a distinction is required between elected and unelected political experience. The main example of elected political experience is having been a local councillor, but there is also the possibility of having been a member of the European Parliament (MEP) or having served in a devolved assembly or parliament elsewhere within the UK. Unelected political

experience is made up of 'instrumental' occupations that are not achieved only by standing for election. This involves a broad range of roles, from being a parliamentary researcher to heading up a think-tank. The uniqueness of being elected is two-fold. In terms of the act itself, it requires a commitment that is simply not present for jobs which do not require the process of election to be undergone. Election is a public act and perhaps requires a loyalty not present in roles achieved privately. It should be acknowledged here that this is not true of all candidates for election; paper candidates are a significant issue in British local elections, but it is probably safe to assume that running for two elections (i.e. local followed by national) is less likely to be a mistake. The second, less ambiguous element, of holding an elected position is the representative function of that role - every elected official has an electorate who she will be expected to represent in some way, be it actively or otherwise. For many councillors, this will involve extended and intense interaction with their communities, in theory helping them develop an understanding of life as a representative, something that again would in theory be useful if one day elected as an MP.

Secondly, the location of the experience should be acknowledged, namely the difference between working at Westminster, or close to it, and being based elsewhere. Working at Westminster will allow individuals a knowledge and familiarity with the geography and workings of the institutions based there, both on a formal and informal level. Linking to the distinctions discussed above and below, it allows access to certain groups of people, social networks based there, and contacts and resources that cannot be cultivated elsewhere. It is clear that there is a big difference between working in the Westminster office of an MP for a Northern constituency and being a local constituency caseworker based in the seat.

A third, perhaps less crucial, distinction is between party and non-party roles. In some ways the distinction is similar to the elected-unelected one - arguably, working for a party is a similar measure of loyalty as being an elected politician for said party. However, the distinction also matters within the context of working at Westminster (in a geographical sense) in terms of the proximity and access to elected politicians and other potential brokers in political careers that working for different organisations will offer an aspirant MP.

The next chapter, chapter three, is the methods chapter of the thesis, and focuses primarily on how best to empirically operationalise the conceptual and theoretical developments of this chapter, which has developed existing scholarship by expanding both its explanatory power through the provision on a new classificatory schema, as well as its scope, by suggesting that post-election patterns can be studied using this framework. I will additionally highlight other factors which work alongside pre-parliamentary experience to affect career trajectory in the House of Commons.

Chapter Three – Methods: studying political experience

In the previous chapter I outlined the theoretical rationale for the subject matter of this thesis; primarily that pre-parliamentary political experience is likely to have an effect of some sort on post-election career progression within the national legislature of the UK. I distinguished between political experience gained on the local level and that gained on the national level, a distinction not systematically made in the existing literature. Finally, I argued that these different types of pre-election political experience are likely to have differential effects on post-election parliamentary career paths.

In this chapter, the methods chapter of the thesis, I describe how my original classification will be empirically operationalised in the empirical analysis which follows in chapters four and five. Looking to the international comparative literature, the chapter first considers how others have studied political careers, if not for precisely the same reasons that concern this thesis, then those adjunct areas which may hold experiential lessons for this work, a subject which is returned to in chapter six. The comparative literature offers further justification for focusing on political experience in isolation from occupational classifications, as such concerns are more common in the European and North American literatures, but missing from the British literature until now. I identify the variables used to measure political experience in the empirical analysis. A further question considered in this chapter is which other variables to consider alongside political experience in order to construct robust, accurate, and useful regression models? Existing studies of Britain and comparative work in adjunct fields, namely from scholars of gender and politics, are utilised to develop a core group of variables which are included in the regression models presented in chapter four.

I begin the chapter by describing the context of the 1997 general election, making the case for using this election as the basis of the cohort study examined in this thesis, a research design that appears not to have been used for this purpose previously in British political science. I then justify the cohort study methodology of the thesis, underlining the various unique benefits offered by longitudinal data, prior to detailing the precise details of the approach used throughout. Following this, I consider the methodological issues discussed above, prior to framing the data itself with some basic descriptive statistics. These statistics

provide a brief introduction to the dataset and the key variables which will be used in the empirical analysis chapters which follow this one. Finally, I outline the measures of 'success' that will be used in the empirical analysis, measures of frontbench progression across various political parties.

The General Election of 1997 - one of a kind?

A lack of generalisability is the price of utilising case-study approaches. However, in order better to understand the case in hand, and potentially draw broader lessons and themes from a specific situation, it is important to provide context. In this section I will examine the unique facets of the 1997 election, particularly those which have relevance to the core elements of the thesis, and highlight areas in which 1997 truly was a one of a kind election.

The 1997 general election saw the highest number of newly-elected MPs since the Second World War, with new MPs making up 36.9% of the total and a turnover rate of 41.9% (Rush and Giddings, 2011, p.33). The election saw a landslide victory for the Labour party, led by Tony Blair, as well as a doubling of the number of women MPs, most of them from the Labour benches. The Labour party won the subsequent two elections, in 2001 and 2005, giving them an unprecedented three consecutive terms in government. This provides a self-enclosed period of time which can be studied as a cohort and used as a 'political generation' in the sense that anyone first elected in 1997 would most likely have reached the highest office they will reach in that thirteen year period. Clearly, there will be exceptions to this, but the high turnover of MPs at the 2010 election, as well as the electoral shift away from Labour, compounds this notion of a generation that has arrived and left again; the beginning and end of a political era.

Amongst the iconic images that have come to define the 1997 general election, a prominent one is the photograph of new Prime Minister Tony Blair surrounded by the female members of his parliamentary party, a group of women who came to be defined as 'Blair's babes' in the popular consciousness. Behind the tabloid hysteria of this moment, the photograph tells a story about the Labour party under Blair. It was younger, the prime minister himself being only 43 years old, and it included women in unprecedented numbers. In turn, the story of the all-women shortlists (AWS) that helped Labour double the number of women in parliament overnight itself tells a broader story about the party of that time. Labour experienced significant change in the preceding two decades, change

that affected the workings of the party and the candidates it put up for election. The popularity of the party, a popularity that arguably stemmed in part from those changes, also resulted in an unprecedented electoral return for Blair and the party he dubbed as 'New' Labour. Here I outline the context for the 1997 election, namely the internal changes made to the Labour party which affected candidate selection and address the question of how representative is the 1997 when attempting to draw general inferences about the core questions of the thesis. A key debate to consider before analysing the data is the local-national divergence within the Labour party in the lead up to the 1997 general election which took the form of the debate over the 'one member, one vote' policy.

Labour: One Member One Vote & Localism

The One Member One Vote (OMOV) debate was one that waxed and waned within the Labour party across the second half of the twentieth century, with the debate reaching fever pitch in the 1980s and early 1990s (Russell 2005, p.62). The debate centred on the question of how to select both candidates and leaders, and whether or not the responsibility for this (in the form of a vote) should lie with individual members or in other bodies seen to represent them (Russell 2005, pp.34-35). Until 1987, the powers of candidate selection lay solely with the General Committee (GC) of each constituency party, a body of representatives and delegates elected by local branches and sent by affiliated organisations respectively (Russell 2005, p.12, p.34). Following the 1987 party conference, a local electoral college system was adopted which gave more power to local members more broadly, but maintained the ability of activists and union members to dominate proceedings. Eventually, OMOV in constituency selections was accepted at the 1993 party conference, with a separate electoral college system being adopted for party leadership elections (Russell 2005, p.53). This is an extremely brief account of what was in reality a complex and drawn-out process (see Russell, 2005 for more detail), but the key point of interest for this thesis is the changes that OMOV made to the concentration of power within the candidate selection process, arguably de-entrenching the power that local elites situated on the GC had to select their preferred candidates and instead dispersing this power more widely across party members.

Throughout the process of adopting OMOV, there was much concern from both the 'right' and 'left' of the party that their respective spheres of influence would suffer in the various reforms proposed (Russell 2005, p.10). The debates occurred within the context of

continued post-defeat agonising within the party, as well as at a time of antagonism between the two wings of the party mentioned above, specifically over issues such as mandatory reselection, seen by the right as an opportunity for left-wing activists to remove MPs unsympathetic to their causes. As such, OMOV was seen by some as a counter-balance to the power of mandatory reselection. Under OMOV, the ability to reselect would be spread more widely across the constituency as opposed to being in the hands of the very-active few who sat on the GC. These individuals were thought to be more likely to be from the left of the party, although some evidence suggests that this is a false assumption (Seyd and Whiteley 1992, p.21, p.24). A number of concerns were aired on both sides regarding this concentration of power in the GC (Seyd and Whiteley 1992, pp.4-5; Russell 2005, p.42). Evidence provided by Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley has shown, however, that the distinction between left and right and between members and activists is not as stark as the received wisdom on the topic suggests, and indeed the terms are frequently misused (1992, pp.8-9).

A key principle here is a perceived tension between the core and periphery of the party in terms of political direction, and how the location of specific powers will affect the ability of different actors to influence this direction (Russell 2005, p.58). This discussion has the potential to be wide-ranging, too wide for this thesis, but can be brought into focus by speculating on the interplay of localism (and its' counterpart of concentrated central influence) and powers of candidate selection. As noted above, the GC previously held the majority of powers relating to candidate selection. As such, a candidate would be well-advised to have cultivated a beneficial relationship with members of the GC in the constituency they were planning to run for. Looking at the same situation from the perspective of the GC, the members of this body may be more inclined to select someone already known to them, indeed someone they may have a long history with. It is clear that established local councillors would be in a strong position under this system, assuming there don't exist huge political differences of opinion within the CLP in question.

The switch to OMOV will have changed this situation, shifting these powers away from the highly active and interested GC to the wider Labour membership of the area, a group with a less intense interest in the machinations of the local party, and indeed the party on a national level (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Seyd and Whiteley 2004). It is possible to speculate further that they are unlikely to be as aware of locally active

individuals as those who are on the GC would be, although this is not to say that they would not value local service or localism any less. It is possible, however, that OMOV opened the door to candidates who are not so entrenched in the CLP, perhaps candidates who instead have sought out political experience by working in Westminster or in other non-partisan political roles. As noted above, local connections would appear to be important in British politics, but the increasing range of ways in which such connections are claimed, combined with the decreased power of the GC and associates, means that, post-OMOV, it is perhaps easier for outsiders to come in and be selected for a seat than it once was.

The Labour majority and unexpected MPs

Another factor to consider, which might also be unique to this specific election in many ways, is the size of Labour's majority at the 1997 election. This majority led to the election of many candidates who were not expected to do so by commentators, and indeed, who didn't expect to win themselves, despite all evidence, from public opinion polling to by- and local election defeats (Norris 1997, p.512). Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston note that many new MPs were 'unknown quantities to the party whips in parliament' and quote one MP elected at the time who dubbed the group of surprise MPs 'the unlikely lads' (2004, p.806). How does this affect a study of the parliamentary career trajectories of this cohort?

In terms of studying those MPs who remain backbenchers for the entirety of their stay in parliament, it cannot be assumed that every MP being studied is seeking promotion. It is a tacit assumption in classic studies of political careers, such as that of Schlesinger (1966) that individuals who are not already upwardly mobile are simply waiting for a favourable opportunity structure to present itself. In other words, there is an assumption that most MPs are looking to be promoted. Richard Fox and Jennifer Lawless, in their study of gendered patterns of political ambition, argue that this rational choice approach is too simplistic. They argue that it doesn't fully account for, amongst other things, gendered life experience and how this might affect perceptions of what a favourable opportunity structure actually looks like. In short, people who aren't looking for political opportunities are not going to see them (Lawless and Fox 2005, p.29). In terms of their progressive ambition once elected to parliament (itself a strong suggestion of some political ambition), are some MPs simply looking not for the way up, but the way to stay where they are?

Arguably, there will be equivalent issues to these present in any cohort chosen for study. Ideally, a broader cohort (for example, the entire post-war period) would be analysed, but such a study is beyond the scope of this thesis. And even so, changes to parliamentary procedure, namely the growth of the select committee system, would create problems when assessing the career options available to MPs. By highlighting and accounting for the limitations of the methodology, I keep them in mind through the subsequent analysis and discussion.

Why a cohort study?

Studying political career paths is by necessity a longitudinal process, with attention focused on a process that takes place across a period of time, measured generally at certain fixed points.

None of the studies discussed above adopt a cohort approach – they look simultaneously at MPs elected at various time points. Hibbing notes that ‘the benefits of career analysis have not been fully realized’, and highlights the predominance of cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, research designs’ (1991, p.406). Hibbing actually goes on to refer to a cohort approach, as used in this thesis, as a ‘shortcut’ arguing that it doesn’t allow for inspection of lifecycle or generational effects (1991, p.406). About this, he is correct, but the remedy to this is a data collection exercise which would have had to have been on a scale beyond the resources of this thesis. However, the nature of the data that I have collected for this thesis is such that it could be incorporated into a dataset of larger size in future, thus facilitating the type of longitudinal approach advocated by Hibbing. Thus, the drawbacks of the approach taken in this thesis (namely, being unable to identify whether the trends seen are the result of period or lifecycle effects) are in many ways matched by the benefits, which include the opportunity to conduct a detailed study of an atypical group of MPs in addition to the ability to provide a rich contextual analysis. So long as no claims are made beyond this sample without qualification, this approach is no less rigorous.

On occasion, the data are broken down into cohorts to test for a possible cohort-versus-generational effect, with Berlinski et al. looking at ministerial promotions under given prime ministers, and Hibbing looking for a cohort effect amongst certain groups of congressmen and women, but none look at the long-term legislative progression of a single group (Hibbing 1991; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012).

A cohort study, for the purposes of this thesis, is the study of a group of people bound by a specific characteristic over a given period of time. Often used in medicine to track the life cycles of individuals with certain illnesses or from various social or ethnic groups, the key aim of the cohort study is draw out patterns across these groups over time. In this case, the characteristic that binds the ‘participants’ of this cohort study is the year they entered the House of Commons and became MPs and the period of time being studied is from the 1997 General Election until the 2010 General Election or the point at which they left the Commons, whichever came first.

The study also focuses solely on those MPs elected to the Commons for the very first time at the 1997 General Election and a total of 242 are included in the analysis. The rationale for focusing specifically on those MPs elected for the first time is quite simple and revolves around understandings of political experience. Even if an MP had, for example, been elected previously for one term, left the Commons, then re-entered at a later election, they will have an understanding of the Commons that a colleague entering for the *very first time* would not have, even if they are both new to the House in the sense that neither were Members of the previous parliament.

The data

The data is cross-sectional, with each ‘case’ holding information relating to an individual MP. There are 242 cases.¹⁸ The dataset constructed for use in this thesis builds on an existing dataset built by Michael Rush, who generously shared his data.¹⁹ However, the Rush dataset was lacking in ways that left it unsuited to the research question posed in this thesis. Firstly, it did not apply the brokerage-instrumental distinction to occupational data, instead listing each occupation without classification. Secondly, it did not consider political experience in a stand-alone fashion, and included incomplete data relating to local council

¹⁸ This doesn’t include the 243rd MP elected initially at this point who was a Member for Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein MPs do not attend parliament once elected owing to their refusal to take an oath of allegiance. Given the focus of the article on parliamentary career trajectories, and the lack of any opportunity for such trajectories available to Sinn Fein MPs, it was decided to exclude this single case from the data analysis.

¹⁹ The Rush data was collected as part of Economic and Social Research Council Award No. R000238382.

service. Thirdly, it included only incorrect and sporadic data in terms of post-election frontbench appointments. It was imperative that these factors were addressed, and to do so involved a significant data collection exercise lasting almost 12 months. Primarily, official sources, such as the Dod's Parliamentary Companion from 1998 (Bedford 1998) were utilised, as was the website of the UK Parliament²⁰ to complete biographical information and unearth prior political experience. Additionally, the internet often held information on MPs from around the time of their election on news websites such as the BBC, or on candidate's own websites.

Having gathered a more complete set of data for all 242 cases, the data then had to be reclassified along the lines of the classification of political experience outlined above. Following this, I obtained electoral data for all candidates which allowed the dataset to denote the marginality of their electoral seat, this in addition to updating variables such as age, death, and so on. At the time of writing, the dataset contains 139 different variables, all mostly complete for all 242 MPs.

This final section will introduce the data, providing some descriptive statistics for the entire sample in the areas which will be analysed in greater detail in the following two empirical chapters. The areas of age, sex, electoral majority and political experience will be considered, amongst others. Such an exercise provides the reader with a firmer grasp of the nature of the data sample prior to more in-depth analysis. All of the variables below will be included in the regression analyses in chapter four.

Measuring political experience

As discussed in earlier chapters, the existing body of work in this area differs from the work of this thesis in two main ways. Much work looks solely at selection for, and election to, the House of Commons, asking who succeeds in this endeavour and who does not (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Secondly, some recent work focuses on the selection of ministers, again asking who makes it to these ministerial positions (Dowding and Dumont 2009; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012). What these do not do, and what the thesis does, is both contrast those who *do* make it to ministerial roles with those who do *not*, and also consider the question of political experience drawn from extra-legislatorial sources, i.e. the sort of occupational political experience as discussed in the previous chapter.

²⁰ www.parliament.uk

So how is political experience measured in existing studies? Berlinski *et al* utilise a measure of political experience in their work which is focused solely on intra-parliamentary experience, namely the length of any previous ministerial tenure (2012, p.60). They class any ministerial experience as ‘some experience’, supplementing this with a more detailed variable measuring the length of said experience in years. Alfred P. Montero, studying the determinants of ‘parliamentary leadership’ in the Spanish *Congreso* in the post-Franco era, utilises measures of political experience closer to those utilised in this thesis (2007). He differentiates between local, regional, and national party positions, in addition to those classified as ‘state bureaucracy’, simultaneously distinguishing elected roles from executive, or unelected, ones (Montero 2007, p.588). The study of the UK House of Commons and German *Bundestag* by E. Gene Frankland, discussed in chapter one, includes two measures of pre-parliamentary political experience: party office experience and public office holding. These two categories map reasonably well onto the national and local distinction discussed in the previous, although Frankland considers these factors only in passing in his analysis, preferring to concentrate on intra-parliamentary factors (Frankland 1977, pp.144-147). Additionally, there is no great consideration of the explicit effect of this experience, or the reasons why such an effect may exist, as Frankland is primarily concerned with the relative impact of pre-parliamentary factors compared to intra-parliamentary factors. Nonetheless, the fact that different types of political experience are acknowledged is noteworthy; particularly that political experience can exist in an extra-legislative way.

Legislative tenure
Ministerial/governmental tenure
Local elected positions (public/party office)
Local unelected positions (public/party office)
Regional elected positions (public/party office)
Regional unelected positions (public/party office)
National elected positions (public/party office)
National unelected positions (public/party office)
Electoral support (personal vote)

Figure 3.1 Measures of political experience utilised in existing studies

The United States (US) literature discusses political experience in a primarily electoral way, experience generally equalling having 'held elective office prior to running for another office' (Lazarus 2008, p.185). Jeffrey Lazarus notes that this 'has become the standard *ex ante* indicator of challenger quality in the study of American elections' (2008, p.185). John R. Hibbing utilises another electoral measure, that of electoral support, in his study of Congressional careers, in addition to more traditional measures of political experience such as tenure (in this case, the number of terms previously served in the House of Representatives) (Hibbing 1991, p.423). Paul S. Herrnson's account of the electoral fortunes of ex-congressional staff perhaps uses the most detailed measures of political experience in the US literature (1994). Like Frankland's comparative study of the UK and Germany, and also in a similar vein to this thesis, Herrnson distinguishes between Congressional staff, elected officials, unelected officials, or those individuals who combine both elected officialdom and Congressional staff experience (1994, p.145).

Studying the Canadian House of Commons, David C. Docherty makes a distinction between political amateurs and professionals, in terms of their political experience, measured by both office-holding at the sub-national level and, secondly, by tenure within the House of Commons (1997, pp.40-59). Similarly, David T. Canon, again studying the US Congress, categorises 'amateurism' as judged 'on the presence or absence of previous political experience' (1990, p2). This prior experience appears to include both elected and unelected positions (for example, Mayor and House or Senate staff, respectively), again something roughly similar to the distinction made in this thesis (Canon 1990, pp.165-166).

Turning to France, Kam and Indridason include measures of parliamentary experience in addition to measures of local political experience (regional council or mayoral experience) when considering ministerial selection in French government (Kam and Indridason 2009, p.45). Similarly, another study considering Spanish ministerial appointments includes prior governmental, parliamentary, regional, and local elected political experience, as well as including a measure of national administrative political experience (similar to Montero's 'state bureaucracy' measure) (Montero 2007; Real-Dato and Jerez-Mir 2009). Eoin O'Malley, studying government formation in the Republic of Ireland, considers electoral success, including a measure of personal vote relative to party vote share in the district of the Teachta Dalá in question (TD – an Irish MP) (O'Malley 2009).

It is possible to see a picture emerging here – studies generally consider political experience to be, *inter alia*, based within the legislature in question (i.e. terms served), drawn from electoral experience or success, or comprised of experience from either other legislatures or from positions held within the hierarchy of the party. It is this final element which most closely correlates to the notion of local or national-level political experience being put forward in this thesis, but these other types of measure will be incorporated into the analysis that follows in chapter four. Such variables act as useful controls for the variables of most interest as well as making the findings of this thesis more comparable to existing work from around the globe. I will further consider how the framework of political experience discussed in this thesis could be applied to comparative work more broadly in chapter six, resuming this discussion.

The previous chapter laid out a theoretical rationale for distinguishing between the two main types of pre-parliamentary political experience in Britain, and for supposing that such experience may well affect political trajectories before and following election to the Commons. This chapter has, so far, examined how others have operationalised the study of political experience, and figure 3.1 lists a number of variables which are used in these studies.

Building on this theoretical and empirical work, when coding the political experience of MPs included in the dataset (of which there are more details below), this thesis will include variables denoting political experience on the local level (including borough, town, regional, and parish councils, local constituency party organisers, or other localised campaign staff), political experience in an national-level political role, and then other variables for those MPs who either combined both of these types of experience or who possessed experience of neither. Further details on this coding are included in figure 3.2.

Local	National
Local councillor (borough, town, regional, parish councils)	Journalism
Constituency party chairs, treasurers, electoral agents, etc.	Public Relations
Local party campaign organisers	Trade Union official
Constituency-based caseworkers	Interest Group representative
	Party worker (national-level)
	Parliamentary staff
	QUANGO staff
	Think-tank staff

Figure 3.2 Coding of political experience variables used in this thesis.

This coding has been applied to the data, and some descriptive statistics can be found in table 3.1. Above, I highlighted that different studies measure experience in different ways, for example sometimes classifying only an occupation that an individual held for a longer period of time than other occupations. I will instead simply code whether or not an individual has *ever* held either local- or national-level pre-parliamentary political positions. Doing so avoids inadvertently missing certain aspects of an MPs' pre-parliamentary experience. As noted in the literature review, the Labour party has a stronger and more entrenched tradition of local councillors becoming MPs, though it should be made clear that this is now a tradition that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats partake in as well. The figures in table 3.1, below, confirm this spread.

Pol. Exp.	Party						Total
	Cons	Ind.	Labour	Lib. Dem.	SNP	UUP	
Neither	30.3	0	11.8	7.7	100	0	14.5
Local	15.2	0	50.0	42.3	0	0	43.4
National	48.5	100	16.3	15.4	0	0	20.7
Both	6.1	0	21.9	34.6	0	100	21.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3.1 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience by party, $n=242$, chi-squared and other significance tests violated assumptions.

As table 3.1 makes clear, different types of political experience are not evenly spread across all the political parties with representative in the cohort. For example, fully 50% of Labour MPs have just local council experience compared to only 15.2% of Conservatives. In contrast, 48.5% of Conservative MPs have just national-level pre-parliamentary political experience compared to 16.3% of Labour MPs and 15.4% of Lib. Dem. MPs. In both of these cases, each respective party has a higher percentage in each category than the mean of the sample (seen in the 'Total' column of table 5.1). Again, these figures reflect the recruitment traditions of the different parties, with the local traditions of Labour and the Liberal Democrats standing in contrast to the less locally-focused ethic of the Conservatives who, as noted in previous chapters, have largely recruited MPs from the business and other professional communities. These figures should be borne in mind throughout the data analysis, as they will aid interpretation of both regression and other statistical findings.

In sum, looking at descriptive statistics alerts us to two main points: firstly, that this is not an evenly distributed sample, and that some characteristics are more prominent than others. Secondly, that this may result in sampling issues throughout the analysis to follow. This should not be considered a weakness however, as the aim of this thesis is not to extrapolate from this sample to a wider population in a quantitative way, but rather combine such analysis with theoretical and conceptual considerations of the data to produce a mixed-methods account of how political experience affects political careers.

Other factors to consider

Another consistent theme in existing work is that there are numerous factors in play in political careers, and as such, to best make the case that political experience is of similar importance, these factors must be considered alongside it. Regression analysis allows for the effect of our variable of interest (political experience) to be investigated whilst controlling for the effect of these other variables. I will consider here the operationalisation of the other variables which these studies consider. Doing this allows the contextual variables generally considered important in studies of legislative careers and activity to be identified and potentially included in the regression analyses in the following empirical chapters.

Age

The age variable, usually measured either at the time of data collection or at the point of first election to the legislature in question, is widespread in legislative studies (O'Malley 2009; Real-Dato and Jerez-Mir 2009; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012). Age is important for various reasons. Being elected young has obvious benefits, not least a novelty value, given the scarcity of MPs under the age of 30. When combined with a safe seat, however, being elected at a young age also gives an MP a long time in parliament, something ideal to the pursuit of a ministerial career. Thus age is something that will affect political careers and therefore needs to be considered in any model constructed in this thesis.

Age by Decade	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under-30	2.1	2.1
30-39	30.6	32.6
40-49	45.9	78.5
50-59	20.7	99.2
60-69	.8	100
Total	100	100

Table 3.2 Age (by decade) of MPs elected for first time at the 1997 General Election, $n=242$.

The House of Commons is an institution dominated by those of middling age, something which has been the case across the entire post-war period. The 1997 cohort is no exception here, with those MPs aged between 40 and 59 constituting a majority of all newly-elected Members. Figure 3.2 outlines some statistics relating to age within the cohort. Out of the new MPs, the youngest was elected at age 25, with the oldest 39 years older and aged 64. The mean age of new electees was 43.4 years of age.

Sex

Numerous studies of political careers consider sex to be an important variable (Frankland 1977; Herrnson 1994; Murray 2010; Berlinski, Dewan, and Dowding 2012), but in what ways could we expect sex to affect the trajectory of a political career? Most overtly, perhaps, it has been shown in the past that women suffer from 'vertical segregation' when it comes to gaining promotion within large organisations, not only in political bodies but in

the wider corporate world (Yule 2000; Jalalzai 2008; Krook and O'Brien 2012). At heart, this means that men will climb higher than women within the hierarchy of an organisation, and the reason for this may be either outright discrimination, gendered perceptions of what women are capable of, or gendered ideas of what women want to achieve. For example, studies have also shown that women, when promoted into executive-level political positions, tend to be disproportionately concentrated in 'soft' portfolio areas which are feminine in terms of their gender-type (Karam and Lovenduski 2005; Krook and O'Brien 2012). These include, for example, health, education, policy areas relating to children and families, and so on. The pros and cons of this situation won't be debated here, but the fact that sex *can* have such an impact renders it worthy of inclusion when modelling political career paths.

Historically the House of Commons, like many national-level legislatures globally, has been dominated by men. As noted above, the 1997 election was notable for the influx of women thanks to Labour's all-women shortlist policy. Despite this, as shown in table 3.3, there are far more men than women in the 1997 newly-elected intake, and therefore far more men than women in the data sample analysed in this thesis.

Sex	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male (<i>n</i> =170)	70.2	70.2
Female (<i>n</i> =72)	29.8	29.8
Total	100	100

Table 3.3 Sex of MPs elected for first time at the 1997 General Election, *n*=242.

The data collected as part of this thesis provides a unique opportunity to examine the relative career trajectories of men and women in the House of Commons. Although not something pursued in this thesis, I have written about this elsewhere (Allen and Campbell, 2012; Allen, 2013).

Electoral Majority

Electoral majority, variously referred to as 'electoral support' or 'personal vote' amongst other names, is considered important to a political career across the existing literature (Frankland 1977; Hibbing 1991; O'Malley 2009). A strong electoral base can provide a politician with longevity in the legislature, a gift which is likely to make them more

attractive to a party leader selecting a frontbench team, for example, as the leader can select them in the knowledge that they are in parliament for the long haul and not prey to the fickle changing of electoral weather.

For elections to the House of Commons, Britain uses a simple majoritarian system with single-member constituencies referred to colloquially as ‘first past the post’. The single-member per seat aspect of the system results in stiff competition for those seats which are traditionally considered ‘safe’ for one political party, a phenomenon discussed in chapter one. For example, seats in urban areas, particularly in the North of England and Scotland, are generally won by the Labour party, whereas the Conservative party have the preserve of seats in the South-East, particularly in an area surrounding London known as the ‘Home Counties’. Such seats tend to have greater concentrations of wealthy voters in comparison to urban seats, although these trends do shift over time.

Majority 1997 (%)	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5 (<i>n</i> =45)	18.6	18.6
6-10 (<i>n</i> =50)	20.7	39.3
Over 10 (<i>n</i> =147)	60.7	100
Total	100	100

Table 3.4 Electoral Majority (1997) of MPs elected for first time at the 1997 General Election, *n*=242.

Looking at the spread of electoral majorities across those MPs first-elected in 1997, the predominance of MPs with safe seats, majorities of over 10%, is clear. In fact, the smallest group of MPs is those with slim majorities, sitting in what are known as marginal seats – these MPs make up 18.6% of the total. In between are those MPs with comfortable electoral majorities, but not ‘safe’ ones, who make up 20.7% of the sample.

Party

For reasons discussed in chapter one, political careers in Britain are affected by belonging to one party over another, with processes of candidate selection and informal recruitment traditions, in addition to ideological factors, affecting which types of pre-parliamentary political experience are most desirable in a candidate or MP (Rush 1994). The relative success of a political party will also affect career paths, including the availability of actual

governmental roles (as opposed to broader ‘frontbench’ roles), as if one’s party is in opposition, there is zero chance of making it into government at least until after a general election (except by ‘crossing the floor’ and switching parties). As I will outline below, this consideration is not particularly relevant to this thesis as I will be measuring both governmental frontbench roles and shadow frontbench roles for all three major parties within the Commons.

Party	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Conservative (<i>n</i> =33)	13.6	13.6
Independent (<i>n</i> =1)	.4	14.0
Labour (<i>n</i> =178)	73.6	87.6
Lib. Dem. (<i>n</i> =26)	10.7	98.3
SNP (<i>n</i> =2)	.8	99.2
UUP (<i>n</i> =2)	.8	100
Total	100	100

Table 3.5 Party of MPs elected for first time at the 1997 General Election, *n*=242.

Within the 1997 cohort being studied in this thesis, it is more useful to consider party as a question of numbers; that is, the Labour party simply has more MPs than any other party. In terms of political careers, the relevance here lies in the fact that it is probably easier to make it to the frontbench if you have less competition. Thus, being a Liberal Democrat MP as opposed to a Labour MP likely leaves more scope for promotion to those positions. In terms of the analysis in the following chapters, this numeric imbalance is not troubling – for example, to avoid overt bias, I will break down the analysis by party when necessary, and regardless of this, what is of interest are the overall patterns relating to political experience, something that can be tracked across party lines.

In Table 3.6, I outline descriptive statistics for other areas of interest for which variables are included in the regression models in chapter four. Experience of student politics and the number of seats previously contested in general elections are clear barometers of prior political involvement, whilst highest educational qualification and attendance at an Oxbridge university are considered proxy measures of candidate quality (Criddle, 2010). Finally, holding a constituency seat located in London is both a measure of geographical

proximity to Westminster in addition to acting as a control on the effect of being a Labour MP in the models that follow.

Experience of student politics	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	90.9	90.9
Yes	9.1	100
Total	100	100
Constituency located in London?	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	90.1	90.1
Yes	9.9	100
Total	100	100
No. of parliamentary seats previous contested at general elections	Percent	Cumulative Percent
None	52.9	52.9
1	33.9	86.8
2	10.3	97.1
3	2.1	99.2
4	0.8	100
Total	100	100
Highest educational qualification	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Secondary school	20.2	20.2
Graduate	64.9	85.1
Post-graduate	14.9	100
Total	100	100
Attended Oxbridge?	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	78.9	78.9
Yes	21.1	100
Total	100	100

Table 3.6 Descriptive statistics for other variables of interest included in regression models, $n=242$

Overall, existing studies tell us three main things. Firstly, political experience is deemed worthy of consideration by authors studying legislative issues, but it is not explored particularly closely, something that is certainly the case for existing studies of Britain. Secondly, socioeconomic variables are essential to individual-level studies, particularly those of sex and education. Thirdly, some sort of acknowledgement of an individual's electoral situation, and the stability of their parliamentary seat, is also required. These final two points will form the basis of the regression models analysed in the following chapter, and all of the variables included in these are listed in figure 4.1.

Measuring 'success' – the hierarchy of frontbench politics

This thesis will look solely at the attainment of frontbench offices and as such the analysis does not incorporate 'backbench' offices, such as select committee memberships or chairmanships. There are both practical and theoretical reasons for this. Practically, incorporating the analysis of select committee offices into the data would have complicated an already time-consuming process, and would perhaps have detracted from other aspects of the thesis. In terms of a theoretical justification not to include them, it is arguable that select committee chairmanships and memberships do not yet constitute a serious alternative to the traditionally prestigious frontbench offices of government and shadow government, although this could change in future.

The structure of British government

British governmental roles are structured in a hierarchical way, with Secretaries of State at the top and junior ministers at the bottom. Beneath the level of junior minister comes the role of Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS). Within the category of junior ministers, there are two tiers – the junior minister and the more junior under-secretary of state (James 1999, p.19). In terms of accountability, ministers are accountable to parliament in areas entailed by their brief. Each Cabinet minister will have their own PPS, with junior ministers sharing theirs (James 1999, p.21). The number of PPSs has risen over time at a rate unmatched by the overall rise in number of paid government posts. In 1999 the numbers of PPSs and MPs in paid government roles stood at 47 and 106 respectively (Butler and Butler, 2000, p71). Clearly this growth of lower-level unpaid roles offers governments the option of using such positions to assuage the ambition of potentially restless backbenchers.

The opposition has a member of their frontbench shadowing each of these Secretaries of State and junior ministers. For example, Andy Burnham, currently the shadow health secretary, is the shadow of Andrew Lansley, the incumbent secretary of state for health. Membership of the shadow cabinet is considered to be a 'certain guarantee of high office if your party wins the next election' (Kaufman 1997, p.7). This senior group of MPs are part of the wider shadow frontbench in the same way that cabinet ministers are senior to more junior members of the government collectively make up the shadow cabinet. Liberal Democrat positions have been incorporated here too, helped by the adoption of similar 'shadow cabinet' terminology by the party in the mid-2000s.

In order to allow for analysis of the data that included the largest possible number of individuals, a scale has been constructed which harmonises the various positions into five equivalent categories. This allows for cross-party analysis to occur. Such a scale is, by necessity, imprecise and will inevitably gloss over the jagged edges of reality and is also open for perennial discussion. The scale is detailed below.

5 – Cabinet Minister / Shadow Cabinet / Lib Dem Shadow Cabinet / Chief Whips / Party Leaders
4 – Ministers of State / Shadow Ministers / Lib Dem Shadow Ministers / Whips
3 – Under-Secretaries of State / Opposition Spokespeople / Lib Dem Spokespeople / Junior Whips / Advocate General
2 – PPS
1 – Backbenchers

Figure 3.3 Harmonised scale detailing hierarchy of highest potential frontbench offices in UK Parliament

Throughout the analysis in this and subsequent chapters, this scale will be referred to whenever discussing office attainment. The text will, for example, refer to 'level five' or to 'Cabinet level or equivalent', and so on.

Aside from literature which focuses on ministerial appointments, the strand of literature that has devoted the most attention to the nature of executive appointments is that of gender and politics, with multiple authors providing a feminist assessment of ministerial portfolio appointments (Karam and Lovenduski 2005; Krook and O'Brien 2012). This work focuses on the relative prestige of posts that men and women are appointed to, in addition to their gender-type – whether or not they are policy areas historically associated with either sex, or are sex neutral. Although these factors will not be considered in this thesis, this framework has been applied to British cabinet posts elsewhere (Allen, 2013), and acts as a reminder that different research questions necessitate the use of different conceptual and methodological frames.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the methodology of the thesis, and described in detail the ways in which the conceptual contributions of earlier chapters will be brought to life empirically. In the next chapter I build on this, operationalising the variables outlined here, and beginning the data analysis of the thesis in full. Various types of regression analysis will be used to assess whether or not political experience has an effect on career trajectory in the House of Commons and ask whether this effect is positive, negative, or neutral for different types of pre-parliamentary political experience.

Chapter Four – Political experience and political careers – establishing an effect

In the previous chapter I introduced the cohort data collected for this thesis, providing descriptive statistics and an overview of the scope of the forthcoming analysis.

Additionally, I discussed how factors other than pre-parliamentary political experience could influence political career trajectories, drawing on existing studies to provide a rationale for the construction of the regression models included in this chapter. I described the methodological approach and methods of data collection utilised in the thesis, providing a specific context for the data by looking in detail at the circumstances surrounding the 1997 general election – the election at which the cohort being examined here were first elected.

Moving on from this, in this chapter I establish the relative importance of pre-parliamentary political experience as something that affects parliamentary success using regression analyses of the cohort data outlined in the previous chapter. I begin by outlining the different factors that could be expected to have an effect on the career trajectory of a politician. Building on the existing literature which identifies sex, age, and education as relevant, I add variables relating of pre-parliamentary political experience, and argue that this is a previously unacknowledged indicator as to why some individuals are promoted to the very top of British politics ahead of others. Pre-parliamentary political experience is broken down into the national- and local-level experience outlined in chapters two and three, and appropriate variables are operationalised throughout. This diverges from an existing literature which would often include political experience in an occupational classification, thereby missing the difference between different types of political experience. Here I make such a distinction and provide empirical evidence to support it, an original scholarly contribution.

I begin by looking broadly at the effect of different factors on career trajectory across all parties within the House of Commons across backbench and frontbench positions. An ordinal logistic regression model is used to establish the effect of a number of variables,

including those related to political experience, on career trajectory. It is established that political experience does have an effect, but that this is small relative to other factors, such as age and electoral majority. However, I note that it could be a fallacy to suggest that these are not interrelated. I continue by focusing on promotion to specific office, as opposed to looking broadly at all frontbench progression – binomial logistic regression is used to look at the effect of variables on progression into frontbench roles, and then specifically into cabinet-level positions. These models find again that varying political experience, although not having the *largest* effect on promotion into either frontbench or cabinet office, does have an effect, and that different types of political experience, either local or national, neither of these or a combination of the two, have different effects on this – some negative, others positive. As such, these findings corroborate the conceptual distinctions made throughout the earlier parts of the thesis, and provide a noteworthy finding. Given that this is unaddressed in the existing literature, it should influence future work in this area. I close the chapter by restating that it is unlikely that all of the factors discussed here are independent, and that in chapter five I will address this interdependency in greater detail.

The regression models

The variables included in the models are listed and defined in figure 4.1. The initial model is an ordinal logistic regression model, and the two that follow are binomial logistic regression models. The key difference between these two types is the nature of the dependent variable, which is binary for the two binomial logistic regression models and ordinal for the ordinal logistic regression model.

Elected student politician (Yes=1) (StudentPol)
Constituency (1997) located in London? (Yes=1) (London1)
Number of seats previously contested?
Electoral majority at 1997 General Election (Marginal [0-4.9%] =3, Neutral [5-9.9%] =2, Safe [10+%] =1) (Majority97)
Sex (Woman=1) (Sex Binary)
Age at first election by decade (in ascending order) (Election Age by Decade)
Highest level of education (Secondary=1, Graduate=2, Postgraduate=3) (Education Numerically Coded)
National pre-parliamentary political experience (Yes=1) (expnationalrecoded)
Local pre-parliamentary political experience (Yes=1) (explocalrecoded)
National and local pre-parliamentary political experience (Yes=1) (expbothrecoded)
Labour MP? (Yes=1) (Lab Binary)

Figure 4.1 Definition and coding of variables included in regression models (Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3).²¹

A note on statistical significance

This thesis uses full population data – that is, the data collected and analysed is not a sample of the target population (those MPs elected for the first time at the 1997 general election), but rather comprises of the entirety of this group. In statistical terms, it is the full population. As such, although tests of statistical significance will be reported in the analysis, the *size* and *presence* of effects will be discussed at greater length than any outcomes of these tests below. Though unusual, such an approach is hardly controversial, with discussion mounting in recent years as to the efficacy of focusing on significance at the expense of effect size (Ziliak and McCloskey 2008).

The first regression analysis is an ordinal logistic regression with the ordinal dependent variable of ‘Highest Office on Scale’, measuring the highest office each individual MP held on the hierarchical scale outlined previously in figure 3.3 (in the previous chapter). As noted, the scale was constructed in order to facilitate cross-party analysis of frontbench positions, with much existing work focusing solely on governmental positions and ignoring their ‘shadow’ opposite numbers. The regressions are split into Labour and Non-Labour models to counteract the negative effect of being a Labour MP on the progression of an individual – in this cohort, being a Labour MP makes any ascendancy less likely to happen with the obvious explanation rooted in ideas of supply and demand. Following the 1997 election, new PM Tony Blair had literally hundreds of MPs to select his government from, compared to a dilapidated Conservative party which had suffered great losses at the ballot box and thus in the size of its parliamentary cohort. As such, being a newly-elected Labour MP was to both ride the wave of national support for the party into the office of MP, but also to have a smaller chance of progressing into government once the tide had changed and it was no longer simply an electoral race. Conversely, being a Conservative MP at this time left one with more opportunities for frontbench office – the offices needed to be filled

²¹ For the purposes of the ordinal logistic regression analysis detailed in table 4.1, a number of these variables were recoded in the opposite order to that presented here. This is because ordinal logistic regression automatically takes the ‘latest’ category as the reference category. The findings below have been written up in a way that replicates the coding here, however, in order to avoid confusion for the reader.

whilst drawing from a significantly smaller parliamentary party. To put it another way, all else being equal, the odds of being picked to be a frontbencher if a Conservative MP are far higher than if a Labour MP. Splitting these regressions into two models allows a more nuanced analysis of the effect of both the variables of interest as well as the influence of party. The regressions are shown below in table 4.1.

Variable	Exp(B) (S.E.)		Exp(B) (S.E.)	
	<i>A - Labour</i>		<i>B - Not Labour</i>	
Elected student politician	8.25**	(.714)	0.47	(.653)
Constituency (1997) located in London?	0.65	(.511)	12.63*	(.1.261)
No. seats previously contested	1.06	(.223)	1.55	(.335)
Electoral majority at 1997 G.E. (10%+)	4.42**	(.531)	3.62*	(.623)
Electoral majority at 1997 G.E. (5-10%)	1.90	(.584)	3.19	(.809)
Sex (Woman)	0.91	(.328)	0.33	(.852)
Age at first election by decade (under-30)	76.32***	(1.014)	-. ²²	-
Age at first election by decade (30-39)	9.78***	(.561)	-	-
Age at first election by decade (40-49)	5.54***	(.480)	1.83	(.669)
Age at first election by decade (50-59)	-	-	0.21*	(.764)
Age at first election by decade (60-69)	-	-	0.00	(.000)
Highest level of education (secondary)	0.68	(.559)	1.82	(1.097)
Highest level of education (degree level)	1.28	(.454)	2.46	(.803)
Oxbridge	1.75	(.438)	0.69	(.621)
Experience – local	0.82	(.530)	0.28	(.810)
Experience – national	0.84	(.636)	2.44	(.728)
Experience - both	0.85	(.577)	1.73	(.887)

Table 4.1 Ordinal logistic regressions, dependent variable ‘highest office on scale’ (detailed in figure 3.3) [link function: logit], *Model A* - Nagelkerke R-square .329; *n*=variable, maximum of 178²³; *Model B* – Nagelkerke R-square .416, *n*=variable,

²² For Model B, this variable was recoded to make the reference category election under the age of forty. This was done to avoid the hugely inflated Exp(B) odds which occurred when the reference category was the same as Model A. This problem occurred due to the lack of cases in the under-thirty category for non-Labour cases.

²³ Tests for multicollinearity were carried out and none was found.

maximum of 64. * significant at .05 level; ** significant at .01 level; * significant at .001 level.**

These regression models measure the effect of these variables on position of an MP on the scale detailed in figure 3.3 (in the previous chapter). As such, it is measuring general upward trajectory on that scale as opposed to membership of a specific point on that scale. Two models are included: Model A, which includes Labour MPs only, and Model B which includes only non-Labour MPs.

Turning to Model A, perhaps the most obvious point to note at first glance is that the size of all the effects in the model (converted to comparable expected values, denoted above as Exp(B)) are relatively small, the only exception the variable for being elected under the age of thirty. Alongside the respectable, but relatively small R-square value, it is likely that the model doesn't necessarily account for all of the factors in play here. That is, there is something missing. When looking at an area like political careers, it is inevitable that there will be a lot of 'noise', or factors that are hard to account for. In this case, for example, informal political fraternities or loyalties may well play a role in the progression of a career. However, the virtue of the approach taken here is that it cuts through this noise to look for broader patterns across a large dataset. That is not to say that the 'noise' should be disregarded – it shouldn't, and will be discussed throughout the analysis particularly in the case studies examined in chapter five – but rather that the wider effects and patterns are perhaps of more interest here than the individual story of each MP.

Looking again at Model A in table 4.1, there are five variables with notable effect sizes, and these variables achieve varying levels of statistical significance. These were, in increasing order, whether an individual had been an elected student politician, a safe electoral majority at the 1997 general election (of 10% or more), and finally 3 variables relating to age at the time of the 1997 general election. The effects are all positive, meaning that they will have a beneficial effect on the odds of an MPs' movement up the frontbench ladder, as detailed in figure 3.3.

The largest of these effects are those related to the age variable. There are three categories of this variable shown above, which indicate, in ascending order, whether an MP was elected under the age of thirty, between the ages of 30 and 39, or between the ages of 40

and 49. The reference category, the category which these three are compared to, is being elected above the age of 50 – in other words, the odds ratios (shown as $\text{Exp}(B)$ above highlight how election at a younger age will have a beneficial effect on progression to the frontbench compared to election at an older age. Election under the age of thirty results in log odds of progression for MPs over seventy times greater than those of MPs elected age fifty or above. Similarly, the log odds of progression for MPs elected age 39 or under are just under ten times greater than those elected over fifty, whilst those of MPs elected in their forties are just over five times greater. In short, for Labour MPs, being elected young has a positive effect on frontbench progression.

The two non-age related effects which are of a notable size are connected to electoral majority and having experience as an elected student politician. Perhaps predictably, having a safe electoral majority of over ten per cent of the vote at the 1997 general election has a large positive effect on the odds of Labour MPs' progressing into governmental roles. MPs with this majority have odds of progression over three times greater than MPs who sat in marginal seats following the 1997 general election, considered to be seats with a majority of less than 5% of the vote. The other category included in the model is those MPs with electoral majorities which are neither marginal nor safe, but rather fall between 5-10%. Such a majority still has a positive effect, but it is under half the size of the effect of having a safe seat, reflecting the fact that the prime minister is perhaps less likely to promote MPs who may not be in parliament following the next election.

As noted above, having experience as an elected student politician also has a notable positive effect on the odds of frontbench progression. MPs with such experience had odds of progression eight times greater than those who lacked it. The effect size maybe particularly inflated for Model A, including solely Labour MPs, owing to the relatively high number of Labour MPs with this type of elected experience as a student politician who not only made it into government, but into the cabinet itself. Individuals such as Charles Clarke, Jacqui Smith, and Jim Murphy all attained cabinet posts by 2010. Additionally, these student posts are also quite likely to lead those who hold them into more traditional instrumental occupational roles, the case for both Clarke and Murphy. As such, it could be argued that the difficulty of untangling the interlinked nature of these various factors means one should avoid placing too much emphasis on any specific effect.

Turning to Model B, perhaps the most striking thing is its similarity to Model A. To recap, Model B was run on non-Labour MPs only. For descriptive statistics relating to how the sample of MPs being analysed breaks down by party, see table 3.5. Needless to say, given the political nature of the 1997 election, this group is much smaller than the Labour group, and makes up around a quarter of the sample. This small sample size does impact on the regression model, for example inflating certain coefficients. However, this does not pose too serious a problem so long as the researcher is aware of the issue and reports it in full.

Model B contains eight variables which are of notable effect size, four of which achieve statistical significance at various levels, all shown in table 4.1. Firstly, two variables which had negligible effect sizes in the Labour-only model have greater prominence here. The sex variable indicates that women's odds of progression are over sixty per cent smaller than their male colleagues. Holding local-level pre-parliamentary political experience similarly has a negative effect, with the odds of progression for MPs with such experience around seventy per cent smaller than those without. To put this another way, for non-Labour MPs, the odds of frontbench progression occurring increase if you are a man and have no pre-parliamentary political experience on the local level. I will return to discuss the role of the other pre-parliamentary political experience variables across both models shortly. The other variable which has a large effect size here compared to being relatively invisible in Model A is being an MP for a London constituency. In Model A, this effect is negative, but in Model B, being MP for a London constituency results in a twelvefold increase in the odds of progression compared to being an MP for any constituency outside of London. This effect could have an inflated effect due to the presence of Liberal Democrat MPs in this non-Labour section of the sample – owing to the small size of their parliamentary party, a higher proportion of Lib Dems will be promoted to frontbench roles than will their Labour or Conservative counterparts. Liberal Democrats also have the highest percentage of London-based MPs in the sample (15.4%). As such, even if only half of these MPs make it to frontbench positions, the variable will likely have a large effect in the model.

The variables in Model B which make up the rest of the group with large effect sizes similar to those seen in Model A. Electoral majority, specifically having a safe seat (again, with a majority of over 10%) has a large positive effect on frontbench progression, increasing the odds of progression over three times compared to sitting in a marginal seat. It is worth noting that having a smaller majority of between 5-10% also has an effect of roughly the

same magnitude. Similar to Model A, age at the time of the 1997 general election has the largest effect size in the model. As noted above, this variable was recoded for use in Model B due to the lack of cases in the under-thirty category. This lack of cases led the Exp(B) outcomes for the variable to become hugely inflated. The findings in table 4.1 can be interpreted in comparison to an MP elected between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine. Thus, the story is very much the same as Model A – election over the age of fifty has a negative effect on the odds of frontbench progression relative to election under the age of forty, and this effect is particularly stark for those elected over the age of sixty. The odds of these MPs progressing beyond the backbenches are a fraction of a per cent of the same odds for an MP elected under the age of forty.

Across both groups of MPs, Labour and non-Labour, there are common themes: a good electoral majority, ideally in excess of 10% of the vote, being under the age of 50 when elected, the younger the better, are all seemingly crucial to frontbench progression. Outside of this, there are variables in the non-Labour MPs only Model B which are not as prominent in Model A, but as explained above, this can be explained in part by sampling issues.

Considering the pre-parliamentary political experience variables, the results are notable mainly for their differences across the two models, highlighting the influence of party on how political experience affects career progression. For the Labour intake (shown in model A), the effects are negative in their entirety, but are small. MPs with local council experience have eighteen per cent smaller odds of progression than colleagues with no political experience at all. Similarly, MPs with national pre-parliamentary political experience and those with both local and national experience have odds of progression sixteen and fifteen per cent smaller than colleagues with no pre-parliamentary political experience.

In Model B, not only are the effect sizes larger, they are also not all negative, with the national experience and 'both' variables having a small positive effect. MPs with national experience have odds of progression twice the size of MPs with no pre-parliamentary political experience, and MPs with both have odds over seventy per cent greater. Conversely, MPs with local experience have odds of progression over seventy per cent smaller. Overall, in terms of how pre-parliamentary political experience contributes to

broad career progression, the answer would seem to be ‘not much’ based on these models. However, there are two caveats to make here. Firstly, given the type of analysis these can be taken as rules of thumb of sorts for considering the ascendancy of an MP within the frontbench hierarchy. That is, we are not looking here at whether or not MPs reached a specific office, for example, but their broad ascendancy on the hierarchical scale outlined previously. As such, these initial findings are not surprising, but do leave a gap open for a more targeted analysis to occur – for this, binomial logistic regression will be used. Secondly, as noted throughout the above discussion, to what extent can we untangle the causality, or even the truly independent effect, of these variables? I return to this question in chapter five.

Concluding this initial analysis, and considering again the variables of note across both models, none are particularly surprising. Electoral majority and relative youth are the standout factors which have the largest effect sizes in both models, indicating that being elected young and being elected to a safe seat offer the biggest contribution to frontbench progression across all parties. How do these guiding principles hold up when considering promotion into specific offices, not just the frontbench overall?

Backbench or frontbench?

As seen above, it would appear that pre-parliamentary political experience has some impact, if not a large or statistically significant one, on the general career trajectory of an MP within parliament. Building on this, in this section I will utilise logistic regression to isolate different levels of office achievement for analysis, highlighting the more subtle impact of these variables when considering the very highest offices available to MPs who may seek them.

The first binomial logistic regression model uses the binary dependent variable of whether an MP’s highest office was as a backbencher or a frontbencher. As such, we are looking at membership of fixed categories as opposed to the movement along a scale which the previous OLS model assessed and how the different variables included affect the likelihood of membership of either group. The first model, which distinguishes between those individuals whose highest office was as a backbencher and those who were elevated to a frontbench office of any description (including PPS for the purposes of this regression), is shown below in table 4.2, whilst the second model, which uses the dependent variable

'Cabinet or not' is table 4.3. As above, each regression is split into two sub-models, one for Labour MPs and one for non-Labour MPs.

An obvious first point of comparison for this regression model is with the ordinal logistic regression model discussed above (table 4.1). Again, it should be noted that the binomial logistic regression considers the change in the odds of an MP's highest office being a frontbench one (as opposed to backbench) given a change in the independent variable. Looking at Model A in table 4.2, the model including only Labour MPs, some similarities with the ordinal logistic regression are apparent. Firstly, broadly the same variables have a large effect size. These are the variables for having been a student politician, having a larger electoral majority, and age at election. It should also be noted that the variables all move in the same direction across both Labour models (Model A in both table 4.2 and 4.3), the latter two being negative on both occasions and the former positive.

In terms of effect sizes for Model A, the student politician, 1997 majority, age at election and national experience variables are the largest. Of particular interest are the effect sizes for the political experience variables, which are mixed. The local council experience variable has one of the smallest effects in the model (a B of only -.113, reflected in a negligible log odds shift). As mentioned, the national experience variable has a much larger effect, with a coefficient of -.655, well over ten times the size of its' local councillor counterpart, and this too is a negative effect. Finally, the 'both' variable, indicating the presence of both local council experience *and* national experience has a 'B' of .330, lying between the two individual political experience variables. Comparing these results with those of Model B, which includes non-Labour MPs only, highlights some key differences.

As noted above, Model B incorporates fewer variables into the analysis than Model A due to the sample size. Owing to the smaller number of non-Labour MPs in the sample, running the exact same regression model on non-Labour MPs resulted in chronic multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity. Therefore variables shown in tests to be the root of this issue were removed one by one until the problem was resolved. Fortunately, it transpired that these were variables with small effect sizes in other models, thus reducing the risk that the model would be irreparably damaged by their absence. However, it is still likely that the remaining variables will have larger effect sizes as fewer other factors are being controlled for. As such, some caution is required when interpreting these results.

Variable BB or FB	Model A (Labour)			Model B (Not Labour)		
	B (S.E.)		Exp(B)	B (S.E.)		Exp(B)
Elected student politician	1.370	(1.133)	3.937	-	-	-
Constituency (1997) located in London?	-.355	(.581)	.715	-	-	-
No. seats prev. contested	.103	(.251)	1.109	-	-	-
Electoral majority at 1997 G.E.	-.673	(.267)	.510**	-.950	(.707)	.387
Sex (Woman)	-.252	(.383)	.778	-	-	-
Age at first election by decade	-1.206	(.290)	.299***	-1.549	(.856)	.212
Highest level of education	.412	(.304)	1.510	.538	(1.128)	1.712
Oxbridge (1)	.248	(.524)	1.282	-2.262	(1.857)	.104
Experience – local	-.113	(.611)	.893	.268	(1.648)	1.307
Experience – national	-.655	(.741)	.519	.731	(1.776)	2.078
Experience - both	.330	(.672)	1.391	.273	(1.573)	1.314

Table 4.2 Binomial logistic regression dependent variable ‘Backbench or Frontbench (1), Model A – n=178, Nagelkerke R-Square .256; Model B – n=64, Nagelkerke R-Square .307.²⁴ * significant at .05 level; ** significant at .01 level; * significant at .001 level.**

²⁴ Regression Model B contains fewer variables than Model A due to issues relating to the sample size. In order for the regression to run without serious multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity, the variables causing these processes were removed one at a time until the model was able to function. The impact of this is addressed in the main text. Interaction terms were not included in these models due to the small sample size. Including such terms resulted in multicollinearity between interaction terms.

Variable	Model A (Labour)			Model B (Not Labour)		
	B (S.E.)		Exp(B)	B (S.E.)		Exp(B)
Elected student politician	2.929	(1.105)	18.715**	-.087	(.757)	.917
Constituency (1997) located in London?	-	-	-	1.662	(1.729)	5.270
No. seats prev. contested	.362	(.634)	1.436	.440	(.394)	1.553
Electoral majority at 1997 G.E.	-2.560	(1.407)	.077	-.129	(.381)	.879
Sex (Woman)	-.375	(.813)	.687	-.235	(.956)	.791
Age at first election by decade	-.811	(.676)	.444	-.455	(.471)	.635
Highest level of education	.503	(.855)	1.654	.856	(.741)	2.353
Oxbridge (1)	1.031	(.864)	2.889	.636	(.685)	1.889
Experience – local	-1.614	(1.465)	.199	-2.296	(1.335)	.101
Experience – national	.417	(1.365)	1.517	.255	(.812)	1.290
Experience - both	-1.628	(1.706)	.196	.379	(.961)	1.461

Table 4.3 Binomial logistic regression dependent variable ‘Cabinet (1) or not’, Model A²⁵ – $n=178$, Nagelkerke R-Square .394 ; Model B – $n=64$, Nagelkerke R-Square .304. * significant at .05 level; ** significant at .01 level; * significant at .001 level.**

²⁵ Model A has had the ‘constituency located in London’ variable removed due to multicollinearity, which is eliminated without it.

In Model B (table 4.2), the non-Labour model, no variables achieved statistical significance, a notable departure from the patterns of Model A. However, the effect sizes of those variables which did achieve significance in Model A, and their direction of travel, remain the same – these are the variables for electoral majority and age at election. The greatest difference is in the Oxbridge variable, which denotes attendance at either Oxford or Cambridge universities. This shifts from a small but positive effect in Model A to a large and negative one in Model B. Of course, the increase in effect size could be a result of the reduced overall model size, but the change in direction is perhaps more compelling regardless of the alterations to the model. Turning to the political experience variables, the major difference is again in the direction of these variables, which are now all positive. That is, all of them have a positive effect in terms of moving from the back- to frontbenches for MPs of parties other than Labour. In increasing order of effect size, the local councillor variable results in an Exp(B) of 1.307, the ‘both’ variable in 1.314, and the national experience variable in an Exp(B) of 2.078. This final effect is both larger than its counterpart in Model A and is positive rather than negative.

Overall, the two models foreground the importance of factors such as age, involvement in student politics, and having a decent majority to increasing the likelihood of making it from the back to frontbenches. This is hardly surprising – it stands to reason that being elected young will both provide an MP with more time to make it to the top in the longer term, but perhaps it is better to read something else into being elected young, namely that in and of itself, it is a mark of confidence in the individual. That is, to have circumvented the often long and torturous process of being selected to challenge a parliamentary seat (something addressed in more detail in the next chapter) suggests that the individual is either very talented and therefore highly rated, that they have had some assistance via useful contacts and so on to help them gain election at such a young age possibly through holding an national position, or both. The size of the effect of having been an (elected) student politician may require a similar interpretation – such experience likely gives the holder a profile, and contacts book, unmatched by colleagues who have not held political office of this type previously.

Also notable are the party differences across the two models, particularly in terms of the effect of pre-parliamentary political experience. For Labour MPs, the effects are mostly negative, with the exception of having both local *and* national experience. For non-Labour MPs, any and all political experience has a positive effect. The conditions under which these effects alter will be discussed below.

Cabinet or not?

Turning to the second set of binomial logistic regressions (table 4.3), some distinct differences are apparent. To clarify, these regression models have as their dependent variable whether someone made it into a Cabinet-level post or not (with yes coded as 1). Model A only includes the cases of Labour MPs whereas Model B includes solely non-Labour MPs.

Comparing the regression models in tables 4.2 and 4.3 allows us to see whether the factors that play a role in either aiding or inhibiting a move from the backbenches to the frontbenches play a similar or different role in assessing whether someone made it not just to the frontbenches, but to the *very top*, i.e. the cabinet or equivalent.

The first thing to note about Model A (in table 4.3) is that its r-squared value is the highest of all 4 models across both tables, a figure of .394, suggesting that this model has more explanatory power than the others. It should also be noted that this model does not include a variable controlling for a constituency being located in London as including this variable led to high multicollinearity. This is likely due to the electoral dominance of the London region by the Labour party that would have reduced the amount of variance in the model. As a result of the omission of this variable, it is expected that effect sizes in Model A may be marginally more inflated than they would otherwise have been, something to bear in mind throughout the following analysis.

In many respects, the two Labour-only models are quite similar, with the same variables having large effect sizes in both – for example, variables for student politician, electoral majority, and age at election. Where the models differ, however, is in the size of variables in the second model for Oxbridge, and then the local council and ‘both’ political experience variables. These last two variables have Exp(B) figures around .190, a large negative effect on the odds of making it to a cabinet-level position if in

possession of either local pre-parliamentary political experience or both local and national experience.

Of additional interest here is the reduced impact of age, which not only fails to achieve statistical significance, something it has done in each model presented in this chapter so far, but also has a greatly reduced effect size. Indeed, this is consistent across both Labour and non-Labour models (see Model B, table 4.3), suggesting that although age is still a factor in promotion, and being younger will help, age alone will not get you all the way to the top. It would seem that other factors, such as political experience and Oxbridge attendance, play a part, with the Oxbridge variable in particular having a notable positive effect and an $\text{Exp}(B)$ of 2.889. Having attended Oxbridge greatly increases the odds of making it into the Cabinet.

The pre-parliamentary political experience variables also differ greatly from the previous regressions, increasing their effect size greatly in Model A of table 4.3 compared to the same model in table 4.2. Of particular interest is the increase in size of the local council experience variable, which is ten times larger in the second model but remains negative. As such, local experience is one of the biggest negative effects in the model, along with a smaller electoral majority and having both types of political experience (which includes having local experience). National experience has a much smaller effect, with log odds of 1.517, but has switched from a negative effect in the backbench/frontbench model to a positive one when looking specifically at the cabinet.

Turning to Model B, the model which includes cases for non-Labour MPs only, a number of variables change in terms of both size and direction. A few decrease in effect size compared to Model A, namely those variables for student politicians, electoral majority, age at election, Oxbridge, and then the national and 'both' political experience variables. Conversely, only number of seats contested, education, and the local council experience variable increase their effect size. Before looking at these changes more carefully, it is worth noting that these changes in and of themselves tell us something interesting – that the factors which affect promotion to cabinet-level positions differ by party. In addition, the changes between Model B in this regression and Model B in the backbench/frontbench regression show that these factors also vary in their impact dependent on the level of office attainment being studied.

In many ways, the differences between the Labour and non-Labour models make sense. For example, it stands to reason that, given their smaller number, these other parties are going to be less fussy, so to speak, over who gets promoted. Or at least, they have less opportunity to be fussy. Thus, factors such as age, electoral majority, and experience as a student politician will perhaps count for less in this situation, explaining their reduced impact and smaller effect sizes in the regression model. This does not, however, explain the massively increased negative impact of local council experience, something which makes those who possess it almost 90% less likely to achieve a cabinet-level role. Of course, it could simply be a side-effect of the fact that the majority of those MPs who did have local council experience are from the Labour party. Therefore, it is not that these parties 'punish' these individuals more than Labour do, but rather there were simply less of them to promote in the first place.

Looking again at the pre-parliamentary political experience variables, other than the hugely negative impact of just local experience (with an $\text{Exp}(B)$ of .101), the national and 'both' variables have a small positive effect ($\text{Exp}(B)$ s of 1.290 and 1.461 respectively). This differs from the Labour only model, where having both types of experience had a large negative effect, and also differs from the backbench/frontbench models (table 4.3) where the effect of this variable was roughly the same across both Labour and non-Labour regressions. Hence having both types of experience may help MPs reach the very top in those political parties that are not Labour. It is worth remembering that this group includes not only Conservative MPs, but also a number of Liberal Democrat MPs as well as MPs from the smaller parties. It is perhaps to be expected that these parties, particularly the Liberal Democrats, will value a mix of both local and national-level experience, relying as they do on a groundswell of local campaigning and support to counteract the higher spending and national reach that the larger parties have.

The empirical data presented in this chapter has established both that political experience has an effect on parliamentary career progression but also that there are other factors in play. In addition, it has shown that no single factor is consistently the most important predictor of success and there is no single variable playing the role of a Rosetta stone, allowing for political career paths to be divined from limited knowledge.

It has highlighted that the factors which combine to result in promotion differ depending on which destination is being looked at (i.e. generic frontbench or specifically cabinet positions), and which political party the MP belongs to.

Those variables which had the most consistently notable effect were a mix of personal characteristics fixed from a point in the personal history of each MP, often from birth, and then more immediate political characteristics. For example, age at election and electoral majority respectively. Thus, it would be easy to state at this point that these factors, particularly age, electoral majority, and having attended Oxbridge are the factors which matter most when considering who makes it to the top of British political life, more so than political experience in any case. But to do so would obscure the complexity of what we are looking at. To suggest that age at election or electoral majority is unrelated to political experience would be wrong. It is not random that some MPs sit in safe seats whilst others do not. It is not random that some MPs are elected young, and without having contested numerous unwinnable seats prior to this, whilst some are elected when older and battle-scarred from electoral dogfights. This raises the question of how different types of political experience interact with these other influential characteristics to either help or hinder individuals when it comes to being promoted. Addressing this question is the work of the next chapter.

Conclusion

The title of this chapter asks the question of whether pre-parliamentary political experience has an effect on career trajectory in the House of Commons. The empirical analysis in the chapter builds on the conceptual groundwork of the previous two chapters. In those, I argued that political experience should be considered separately from occupational experience and that different types of political experience should be distinguished from one another in both conceptual and empirical work. In this chapter I provide evidence that different types of political experience have differential effects on political career trajectories in the British House of Commons.

The data analysis in the chapter focused on the presence and size of effects rather than their statistical significance – as the entire population (i.e. not a sample) is present in the data, such tests are not strictly necessary in order to assess effect strength. They were, however, reported, though were not given the prominence that has become

traditional in similar research. It was found that across a number of measure of career progress, including a generalised 'highest office' regression, alongside more specific binomial logistic regressions looking at both frontbench and cabinet-level roles in particular, pre-parliamentary political experience *does* have an effect. A key point to note is that this effect is not always positive, is not consistent in size, and is never the biggest in the model. That is, other factors are equally, if not more, 'important' and have larger effect sizes. This is hardly surprising – it stands to reason that factors such as electoral majority and age will have larger effects, though it has also been contested throughout this chapter that these factors are likely interlinked.

The nature of interrelation is the focus of the next chapter, chapter five, which will highlight the ways in which political experience, and the different ways that individuals initially engage with the political system, affect their subsequent political careers, including their electoral majorities, their first promotions, and indeed their overall career achievements. It will show that where you come from really does affect where you go.

Chapter Five - Mapping the preferential political career

In the previous chapter I used regression analysis to establish firstly that pre-parliamentary experience has an effect on career trajectory in the House of Commons, secondly that this effect differs depending on the type of political experience, as well as by party, and thirdly, that other effects are consistently greater in size. In particular, factors such as the age of an MP at the time of their first election, as well as their electoral majority were shown to have a large effect on political career trajectory, with youth and a large majority having a notable positive impact. Confirmation that pre-parliamentary political experience affected career trajectory post-election is an original contribution to the existing literature. I argued, however, that many of the factors being analysed overlap in some way and that it is hard to untangle fully the contribution of these various things, even when using regression analysis.

In this chapter I build on those broad findings by looking specifically at how these factors do interrelate, and argue that pre-parliamentary political experience will shape an individual's interaction with these other factors, in essence providing them with a preferential political career path throughout their political lives. I map the ways in which pre-parliamentary political experience interacts with other characteristics and events, such as age, safeness of seat, and so on, to aid or hinder an individual's progress depending on the type of experience they have. Beginning at the stage of unsuccessful contestations of parliamentary seats at elections, and moving through to look at age at first election, electoral majority, first promotions and highest offices, I show how national-level political experience is more prevalent in politicians who are elected younger, promoted faster, and end up in higher office than their colleagues who cut their political teeth at the local level.

Moving chronologically, I begin at the candidate selection phase, asking whether pre-parliamentary political experience affects the ability of candidates to find a seat first time round, before looking at whether electoral majority, first non-backbench promotion, and highest office achievements, amongst others, differ by pre-parliamentary political experience. Throughout the chapter, case studies of real MPs will be used to elucidate the findings, and these are interspersed with the main text.

Completing the empirical analysis of the thesis prior to broader contextualising of the findings in chapter six, this chapter foregrounds that pre-parliamentary political experience does indeed affect career trajectories within the UK parliament, that different types of experience have different effects, and that these effects only take hold at certain stages of a career.

Finding a seat

For any aspirant MP, indeed any aspirant politician, the first step in a political career is to gain access to their political venue of choice (Lawless 2012). Aspirant parliamentarians in the UK must stand for selection as a party's parliamentary candidate for a single constituency. In other words, they need to find a seat where their party has not already selected a parliamentary candidate for the next election and stand for selection there. The processes by which this selection takes place in the three main political parties were detailed in chapter one, and the ways in which different elements of the process may be biased in favour of certain types of political experience were noted. In smaller parties, it is feasible that candidates may be approached and asked to run, and there are fewer formal structures and processes in place when selecting a parliamentary candidate. For the majority of MPs in the House of Commons, however, finding a seat and navigating the process of candidate selection is essential to their career progression, and this often fraught process is well documented in the academic literature (Rush 1969; Bochel and Denver 1983; Katz 2001).

As noted in chapter one, a common occurrence in the process of becoming an MP is for many MPs to have unsuccessfully fought a seat before being elected (Rush 1994, p.575). The importance that constituency parties place on this 'bleeding' when selecting a candidate is unclear, but evidence from King (1983) suggests that it became more common between the 1940s and 1980s for candidates to have been unsuccessful in another contest before winning selection and election to the Commons. Looking specifically at cabinet ministers, this trend is even more pronounced, with a third of Thatcher's cabinet, including the Prime Minister herself, having fought unsuccessful seats at one time (King 1983, pp.266-267). Arguably seen as part of a political apprenticeship (Ashe et al. 2010), it variably provides both the experience of running for office, but equally acts as proof of party loyalty, of being willing to get one's hands dirty for the cause. Of interest to this thesis is whether or not this phenomenon is more

or less prevalent amongst different groups of individuals elected for the first time at the 1997 general election dependent on the nature of the pre-parliamentary political experience they possess. As was also noted in chapter one, within this process safe seats, those seats which are traditionally held by a single party for long stretches of time, are prized. If an aspirant MP gains selection as the candidate for a seat which is safely in the grip of their party, they are the *de facto* MP from that moment on.

There are various ways to interpret any differences across groups in this process of 'bleeding'. It can be assessed as a measure of determination in the sense that candidates who gain more than one candidacy but have no electoral success are evidently keen on making it to the Commons. Conversely, continued loss could also be seen as a mark of misguided confidence and of lack of quality in a candidate – if election requires selection in either a marginal or safe seat, and this hasn't happened after numerous attempts, it might be seen as the time to accept that it may not happen anytime soon. The regressions in the previous chapter showed that although the effect of having run unsuccessfully in multiple seats is small, it is always beneficial. That is, there is not necessarily any harm in it. Having said that, multiple runs without success are likely to result in a candidate being older when they do finally make it into the Commons, something which in turn will affect their progression to their frontbenches.

No. of seats prev. contested	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total (%)
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
0	42.9	55.2	54.0	53.8	52.9
1	40.0	29.5	36.0	36.5	33.9
2	14.3	12.4	8.0	5.8	10.3
3	2.9	2.9	2.0	0	2.1
4	0	0	0	3.8	.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.1 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and number of seats previously contested, $n=242$; no differences were found to be significant (Chi-squared test), $p=.415$.

Table 5.1, above, suggests however that there is no significant relationship between pre-parliamentary political experience and the number of electoral contests a candidate has participated in prior to election to the Commons. It should be noted that this table collects data only for those occasions when the individual was selected as a parliamentary candidate and ran for election. Of additional interest here would be the number of seats for which selection was contested but not achieved. Unfortunately, such data are not widely available, if even in existence at all, and as such are not presented here.

More than one diff. seat?	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total (%)
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
No	75.0	78.7	87.0	79.2	79.8
Yes	25.0	21.3	13.0	20.8	20.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.2 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and more than one different seat previously contested, $n=114$; no differences were found to be significant (Chi-squared test), $p=.890$.

Another point of interest here, and pertinent to debates surrounding the rise of career politicians, is that of localism. One accusation levelled against ‘career politicians’ is that they lack ties to the constituencies that they represent in the Commons. They are perceived to embark on selection tours in search of a seat which serves only as a conduit through which they can express their political ambitions as opposed to a geographically-bounded area of which they are ostensibly proud to be an elected representative (Childs and Cowley 2011). One way of measuring this process of ‘shopping around’ for a seat is by looking at whether a candidate who has contested in excess of one parliamentary seat unsuccessfully did so in the same constituency, or instead has contested multiple seats. Overwhelmingly, as shown in table 5.2, it is the case that candidates are quite ‘loyal’ to seats they have contested unsuccessfully, with a large majority of 79.8% contesting the same seat more than once unsuccessfully prior to their eventual election in 1997. There is little variation across the types of political experience, with locally- and nationally-focused experience yielding almost identical patterns. There are no statistically significant relationships visible in the data. MPs with

neither local nor national-level political experience are more likely to have run in multiple seats. It may be that these candidates with no political experience might see this touring around, and bleeding, as a process of initiation and a way to earn some recognition and respect within the party. For those with experience, it is possible that these candidates were perhaps running in seats where the party has asked them to, secure in the knowledge that they were likely to suffer a loss and had therefore struggled to find a willing sacrificial lamb – a further indicator of party loyalty.

However, as shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2, there is no significant advantage or disadvantage to having a certain type of pre-parliamentary political experience when seeking selection as a parliamentary candidate. This is surprising, as one would expect local parties, who largely control candidate selection processes, to select candidates with local experience in greater numbers than candidates with no such experience. Counteracting this, however, are the other forces in play in these processes. As discussed in chapter three, the Labour party, for example, saw the central party leadership attempting to exert control over the candidate selection process in various formal and informal ways (Katz 2001; Russell 2005). Breaking the analysis down by party yields no significant differences across the different parties.²⁶ The formalities of empirical data also do not allow the intricacies of processes such as these to be accounted for in full detail. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) highlight the complexity of these candidate selection processes, and the various backroom conversations and wrangling, which remain unseen and impossible to quantify, are perhaps the cause of the inconclusive outcomes seen here.

Age at election

Regardless of how many times you try to get into the Commons, if you have your eyes on a frontbench career, you would be advised to get in whilst young. All of the regression analyses presented in chapter four highlight the importance of age as a predictor of office attainment. The story here is clear – the younger the age at which you are first elected, the higher your chances of reaching a frontbench office. In fact, when considering the regression results, it is clear that in many ways age is *the* factor

²⁶ Fisher's exact test was used where sample size was too small for chi-squared tests. Tests were not run on smaller parties Scottish National Party, Ulster Unionist Party, or on the sole independent MP due to small sample sizes.

that matters, at least according to the statistics. But to interpret age on its own would be a fallacy – people are selected for, and elected to, parliament at a young age for a reason (i.e. it is not a random selection, and their age is unlikely to be the sole reason they were selected). As noted throughout the literature review and earlier chapters, selection by a constituency is often the result of precise manoeuvres through formal and informal processes, involving personal contacts, friends of friends, many hours on the phone, and calling in favours (Rush 1969; Budge and Farlie 1975; Bochel and Denver 1983; Gallagher 1985; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Katz 2001; Gaunder 2007; Cheng and Tavits 2011; Lawless 2012). Again, it is not a random process. Therefore it is of interest to highlight the ways in which political experience interacts with selection, particularly the age at which people are selected.

Research that discusses the prospects of women councillors challenging a parliamentary seat notes that, in many cases, these women will be older than their male colleagues taking the same step (Briggs 2000; Allen 2012, 2013). It is possible to generalise this assertion to all councillors, regardless of sex. As table 5.3 shows, those with local experience are more likely to have been elected to parliament at over the age of 40 than any other group, a difference that is highly statistically significant.

Age at election (by decade)	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total (%)
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
Under-30	2.9**	1.0**	4.0**	1.9**	2.1
30-39	20.0**	24.8**	56.0**	25.0**	30.6
40-49	65.7**	44.8**	32.0**	48.1**	45.9
50-59	11.4**	29.5**	6.0**	23.1**	20.7
60-69	0**	0**	2.0**	1.9**	.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.3 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and election age by decade, $n=242$; ** differences significant at the .01 level (Chi-squared test), $p=.002$.

It is impossible to separate out here whether such a difference is because those with local experience *aren't* trying to be selected or whether they are trying but *can't* be

selected. In any case, knowing this wouldn't change the fact that many of them are not entering parliament at a young age, and are put at a relative disadvantage *vis a vis* career progression than their colleagues. That is, regardless of the hidden machinations, knowing what is shown in table 5.4 tells us something important about the role of local councillorship in the context of a political career. If being younger is a major career boost, as the regression analyses in the previous chapter would suggest, it is one whose use is dominated by those with certain types of political experience, namely national-level, over others – those rooted in local politics.

The young professional politician - Yvette Cooper (Lab)

Yvette Cooper entered the Commons at the age of 28, taking over the safe Labour seat of Pontefract, a seat she holds to this day. Her background was professionally political; she had been an economic researcher for Leader of the Opposition John Smith before going to work for Bill Clinton, then a presidential candidate, in 1992. Two more roles in research and journalism followed before her election in 1997. Once elected, she had to wait only two years before being promoted to a junior ministerial position in the Department of Health, a role swiftly followed by other roles in Health, the Lord Chancellor's department, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the position of Chief Secretary of the Treasury before taking her position as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions 12 years after her first election. Since the 2010 General Election, and the end of the period studied for this thesis, she has maintained her position at the top of British politics, becoming Shadow Home Secretary under new Labour leader Ed Miliband. In many ways, Cooper is the ideal-type 'professional' politician – elected young and promoted fast. She has held a number of instrumental political occupations at the national level and has gained promotion after promotion. Her first promotion was to a junior ministerial position, shown by the data presented here to be an indicator of future success.

In contrast to Yvette Cooper, for example, a local councillor may have a career outside of politics which commandeers much of their time, leaving politics as something they pursue on the side until such a point that they are able to cease their existing occupation and run for parliamentary office. As noted above, this is a pattern seen amongst women councillors, who are more likely to run for higher office once their primary caring commitments have largely finished, usually occurring when their

children reach a certain age (Briggs 2000; Allen 2013). However, as emphasised in chapter four, there are clear benefits to being elected at a young age, including initial promotions into higher office than other MPs, and the more obvious benefit of having longer in parliament if this is electorally possible and personally desirable.

Majority

Electoral majority is also shown to be a factor of influence across the regression analyses, with its influence differing depending on the position being focused on and also depending on which party the MP belongs to. For example, in terms of how it affects the attainment of cabinet-level positions, having a marginal majority (of less than 5% of the overall vote within a constituency) damaged Labour MPs chances of reaching Cabinet by up to 90%, whereas it damaged non-Labour MPs chances by only 12%.

The electoral majority (as a percentage of overall constituency vote) of an MP at the 1997 general election was used as a measure of majority rather than also including the 2001 and 2005 elections. The rate of attrition of MPs means that sample sizes would fluctuate across the three elections, and those MPs who remained would be naturally predisposed to reach higher office in greater numbers than those who did not (for whom higher office would no longer be an option). Additionally, it is likely that the electoral majority gained by an individual would not change beyond recognition across the three elections, with the possible exception of 2005 which saw the fallout from the Iraq war affect Labour's electoral health. As such, majorities from the 1997 election are used throughout the thesis when using majority as an empirical variable.

The phenomenon of safe seats is widespread within the British system, aided by the first past the post electoral system (Rush 1994, p.570). A safe seat is one which is almost entirely dominated by a single party and one which they are likely to retain regardless of national electoral performance. These seats are highly prized by prospective MPs as they guarantee a long stint on the Commons' benches and are an ideal springboard from which to ascend to high office, be it governmental or internal party office. Another consequence of the safe seat phenomena is the de facto transfer of power for choosing an MP from the wider constituency electorate to the local

members of the dominant party, further entrenching the importance of the candidate selection process in assembling the Members of the House of Commons.

Amongst other things, electoral majority is a measure of an MPs' job security – that is, if an MP has a large majority, they are less likely to lose at the next election, and are therefore less likely to worry about such an eventuality. Having a 'safe seat', one traditionally won by one party, will also result in a long tenure should the MP want it. As such, it is the perfect base for a long and successful parliamentary career and would presumably be highly prized by prospective MPs. As noted above, it is common for MPs to run in unwinnable seats at first, a rite of passage of sorts, before graduating to seats which they have either a reasonable, good, or almost certain chance of winning.

Electoral majority 1997 GE (%)	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total (%)
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
1-5%	14.3	21.0	16.0	19.2	16.0
6-10%	22.9	24.8	24.0	7.7	24.0
Over 10%	62.9	54.3	60.0	73.1	60.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.4 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and electoral majority at the 1997 election, $n=242$; no differences were found to be significant (Chi-squared test), $p=.241$.

Generally, a majority of less than 5% (of the overall vote) is considered marginal, one greater than 5 but less than 10 is considered neutral, but not safe, and a majority greater than 10% is deemed to be safe. Table 5.4 shows that there are no significant differences in electoral majority based on different types of pre-parliamentary political experience. In many ways, this is not a particular surprise – the dispersion of safe electoral seats amongst MPs will reflect their selection for those safe seats, and as seen above, these processes are intensely complicated, with various forces coming into play. Here, it is likely that for each MP with national-level political experience who was able to use this to secure a safe seat utilising their party contacts, there was a local stalwart in a safe seat being selected as the previous MP retired. Thinking specifically about the context of the 1997 election, it is also likely that seats which generally may have been

Labour seats, but only with a majority of between 5 and 10 per cent, saw Labour gains in line with rest of the country, shifting these majorities into 'safe' territory. Additionally, despite being so highly prized, table 5.4 shows that a majority of newly-elected MPs sat in safe seats following the election – thus, they may be prized, but they are not necessarily rare. Charles Clarke, former Home Secretary, gained a large majority at the 1997 election, building on a history of local and national political experience.

Sitting in a safe seat- Charles Clarke (Lab)

Charles Rodway Clarke entered the Commons in 1997 as MP for Norwich South with a majority of over 10% aged 47. Clarke rose to national prominence in his twenties when he became President of the National Union of Students, this following a stint as President of Cambridge Students' Union. From 1980, he served as a councillor in the London borough of Hackney and at the same time acted as Chief of Staff for Neil Kinnock for 11 years until 1992, who became leader of the Labour party during this period. As such, Clarke falls firmly into the 'both' category when it comes to pre-parliamentary political experience, holding posts at both local and national level. Following his election to parliament, it took him only a year to gain promotion to the position of junior minister at the Department for Education and Employment. After only a year in this position, he took up a similar role at the Home Office, before becoming Minister with Portfolio in 2001 and then making the step up to Secretary of State level in 2002, this time back at the newly-fashioned Department for Education and Skills. Clarke took up his position as Home Secretary, one of the great offices of state, in 2004 and remained there for two years. Clarke is a clear example of someone who combined different facets of political experience over his pre-parliamentary life, gaining national prominence and national-level contacts in his NUS role and his position alongside Kinnock, but also gaining local experience on a prominent London council. This profile, and reputation, likely left him with good contacts at the top of the party, as well as a fast promotional arc, despite being elected at a relatively higher age. Clarke left the Commons in 2010 having lost his seat by a few hundred votes.

Out of the blocks - first promotions

Once into the Commons, and the first cabinet and frontbench teams have been selected, new MPs will try to get to grips with the multiplicities of their new role in a process of parliamentary socialisation (Rush and Giddings 2011). Within a few years,

however, attention turns to promotions, rumours of reshuffles resulting in hours sat by the phone waiting for the party leader to call (King 2007; Mullin 2009). The question here is one of who gets promoted from the backbenches for the first time, when, and to which positions?

First, do MPs with certain types of pre-parliamentary political experience move off the backbenches faster than those MPs with other types of experience? Does any recognition or personal connection afforded those who may have worked in close proximity to the party leadership within Westminster result in their speedy promotion?

First promotion in first term?	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total (%)
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
No	16.7	46.7	41.7	30.6	37.2
Yes	83.3	53.3	58.3	69.4	62.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.5 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and first promotion in first term, $n=156$; a chi-squared test found no significant differences, $p=.054$.

Looking at whether or not an MP was first promoted from the backbenches in their first parliamentary term (in this case, prior to the 2001 general election), table 5.5 shows that a majority of MPs were promoted within this time period, 62.8 per cent; perhaps the more interesting facet of this is the offices into which these promotions were.

Does the office into which a first promotion occurs matter? Are some better springboards into even higher office than others? Although not included in the regression analyses²⁷, table 5.6 shows that there is a relationship between first

²⁷ This variable was not included in the regression analysis as it is considered to be a post-election characteristic that was not fixed at the time of election. This is not to say it does not have an effect (it does), but to have included it alongside characteristics such as sex or age would have diluted these fixed characteristics and diminished our ability to assess their relative importance.

promotions and ultimate highest offices. Indeed, this is a relationship which is both statistically significant and large in size.

Highest office on scale	First office on scale			Total
	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	
2 – PSS, etc.	41.6***	.0***	.0***	20.6
3 – U/Secs of state, etc.	19.5***	41.1***	9.1***	25.8
4 – Min. of State, etc.	32.5***	35.7***	45.5***	35.5
5- Cabinet, etc.	6.5	23.2	45.5	18.1
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 5.6 Crosstabulation of first office on scale by highest office on scale $n=155$; * differences significant at the .001 level (Chi-squared test), $p=.000$.**

As table 5.6 shows, the higher the office in which you start, the higher you are likely to go. This relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level. 41.6% of those MPs whose first promotion was to a PPS-level position never moved above it, with only 6.5% of cabinet-level ministers starting at that point. Conversely, nearly half (45.5%) of those MPs first promoted into Minister of State-level roles ended up ascending to the Cabinet or equivalent. Despite some movement, it should be noted that almost half of all promoted MPs remain in the positions to which they are first sent – 41.6% of PPS's stay there, 41.1% of Undersecretaries of state, and 45.5% of Ministers of state. Overall, an average of 42.7% of MPs do not ascend beyond their first non-backbench role, again underscoring the beneficial nature of an initial appointment to higher office.

Promoted early, promoted high - Dominic Grieve (Cons)

Dominic Grieve entered the Commons in 1997 as MP for Beaconsfield, a safe Conservative seat, following in the footsteps of his father who was a Conservative MP in the 1960s. Elected at the age of 41, Grieve had been a local councillor over ten years prior to the election in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (1982-6), which in turn built on some experience in student politics, having been President of the Oxford University Conservative Association in 1977. His professional career was in the law, a field in which he had considerable success. He contested his first parliamentary seat without success in 1987, but did not contest the 1992 general election. Following his election, Grieve spent time in the select committee system before being promoted to

the position of Opposition Spokesman for Constitutional Affairs and Scotland in 1999. After moving from this role to a similar one in the Home Office in 2001, Grieve became Shadow Attorney General in 2003 and remained in position for six years, after which he became Shadow Secretary of State for Justice. Following the 2010 general election, Grieve became Attorney General. Grieve is in many ways an atypical Conservative, not having a business background and having experience of local politics in a formal sense, but this has not hampered his progress in the Commons.

On this basis, being promoted in the first instance into a relatively high office will likely be of greater benefit to future progression than, say, becoming a PPS. This raises the question of whether or not these promotions are related to pre-parliamentary political experience.

First office on scale	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
2 – PSS, etc.	30.4*	62.1*	36.8*	55.6*	49.7
3 – U/Secs of state, etc.	52.2*	31.0*	34.2*	36.1*	36.1
4 – Min. of State, etc.	17.4*	6.9*	28.9*	8.3*	14.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.7 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and first office promotion, $n=242$; * differences significant at the .05 level (Chi-squared test), $p=.025$.

Table 5.7 shows that they do; that first promotions differ along the lines of political experience, and again, the patterns seem to favour the preferential career progression of those MPs with previous experience in national-level political life. As can be seen in the table, first progressions ranged across three points on the scale (laid out in figure 3.3), from PPS roles and equivalent to Minister of State level, which is itself one level below the cabinet. No one in the 1997 cohort was promoted directly to a cabinet-level role, information that highlights the springboard nature of lesser roles. Just under half of MPs who were promoted at all during their time in the Commons first made the small step up from backbencher to PPS, the first promotion destination for 49.7% of the 155 who moved beyond the backbenches. But it was the destination for 62.1% of

MPs who possessed solely local council experience compared to only 36.8% of those with only instrumental experience, 55.6% of those who had both, and just 30.4% of those MPs who had neither. Turning to assess those who made the biggest leap shows a similar trend – 28.9% of those MPs with instrumental experience alone made it to the Minister of State level at their first promotion compared to only 6.9% of MPs with only local experience, 8.3% with both, and 17.4% with neither. These differences are statistically significant. In terms of those MPs who made it to the halfway point between these stages, the level of Undersecretary of State and equivalent, the spread is more even with the exception of the 52.2% of MPs with neither type of political experience making it to this stage at first promotion. A number of these individuals are what could be termed ‘business Tories’, who have had successful business and other professional careers. This phenomenon is discussed further below.

First-term promotion - Oliver Letwin (Cons)

Oliver Letwin was elected as the Member of Parliament for West Dorset 1997 on his third attempt. He unsuccessfully fought the elections of 1987 and 1992 in Hackney North and Hampstead and Highgate. He was only 41 years of age when elected, and held instrumental political experience of the most senior kind, having been a member of Margaret Thatcher’s policy unit in the mid-1980s. Outside of politics, his career combined academic posts both in the UK and the USA with roles in the private sector, including banking. Following his election, Letwin was appointed to the role of Opposition Spokesman in the area of Constitutional Affairs in 1998 before becoming Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 2000. His star continued to rise with further promotions in 2001 to the role of Shadow Home Secretary and in 2003 to the position of Shadow Chancellor. Since then, Letwin has taken more of a back seat in Conservative affairs, becoming the Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs before focusing primarily on electoral strategy in the lead up to the 2010 General Election. Since the formation of the Coalition government this strategic oversight has continued in his role as Minister of State for Policy. Letwin’s career bears many of the hallmarks that could be expected of an MP with high-level instrumental experience. Once elected, his first promotion was to a junior ministerial position, and this was soon followed by a move to a string of cabinet-level roles. However, he is also atypical in that his time at the very top, at least in the most prominent positions, has been limited, and in that he failed to obtain a safe seat without contesting numerous

other, tougher, electoral challenges. In any case, though, Letwin has been at the top of British politics on both sides of the fence – advising lawmakers in the 1980s, and being one of them in the 2000s.

Reaching the top...or not

Finally, we come to the issue of the relationship between highest office achievement and pre-parliamentary political experience. Table 5.9 confirms that political experience interacts with other characteristics and variables and results in different career outcomes dependent on that experience. The patterns in table 5.8 are both highly statistically significant and large in size, delineating themselves along the lines of political experience. A higher percentage of those MPs with local experience only remained backbenchers for the duration of their time in parliament than any other group, and over 20% more than those MPs with just instrumental experience (44.8% to 24.0% respectively). The opposite is true for the other end of the scale, with 30% of those MPs with national-level experience only making it to level 5 (Cabinet-level positions or equivalent) compared to just 2.9% of MPs with solely local experience. This divide is equally stark when including both of the top two levels in this analysis, with 64% of instrumentally-experienced MPs making it to either of these stages compared to just 22.9% of their locally-experienced colleagues.

Highest office on scale	Pre-parliamentary political experience				Total (%)
	Neither (%)	Local (%)	National (%)	Both (%)	
1	31.4***	44.8***	24.0***	30.8***	35.5
2	0***	18.1***	8.0***	17.3***	13.2
3	31.4***	14.3***	4.0***	23.1***	16.5
4	22.9***	20.0***	34.0***	17.3***	22.7
5	14.3***	2.9***	30.0***	11.5***	12.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.8 Crosstabulation of pre-parliamentary political experience and highest office attainment, $n=242$; * differences significant at the .001 level (Chi-squared test).**

Interestingly, it is the case that more of those MPs with neither of these types of experience made it to the very top than those with both, something that is perhaps

counter-intuitive – surely the more experience, the better? Apparently not: at least not in this case. 37.2% of those MPs with neither type of experience made it to either level 4 or 5 compared to 28.8% of those MPs with both. Again, all of these differences are highly statistically significant. Indeed, both the local-only and ‘both’ categories are the only two which have a higher percentage of MPs remaining on the backbenches compared to making it to the top two levels. How to account for this? Many of these individuals are Conservative MPs with solid business or other professional backgrounds, such as Owen Paterson, Phillip Hammond, Archie Norman, Nick Gibb, Eleanor Laing, and Dominic Grieve. An example from the Liberal Democrats is Dr Evan Harris, who gained election having held prominent positions within the British Medical Association. For these individuals and their parties more broadly, political experience was seemingly seen as less essential in terms of getting on in the Commons.

However, it is not the case that there weren’t some exceptions to the patterns laid out above, and in the previous chapter. Hazel Blears and Theresa May both entered the House of Commons in 1997. In a number of ways they are similar; they are both women in a male-dominated institution, they both entered parliament at the same age and since then, they have both ascended to the very top of their respective parties and governments. But perhaps the most notable characteristic they share is their political experience before becoming MPs. Both May and Blears were local councillors, and they are two of only nine ex-local councillors who did make it to the very top in the 1997 cohort – in many ways, the odd ones out.

From local to national, the odd one out - Hazel Blears (Lab)

Blears entered the Commons as MP for Salford, a safe Labour seat, aged 41. Almost immediately, she became PPS to notable Blairite Alan Milburn, Secretary of State for Health at the time, and following this, held various junior ministerial posts in the Department of Health before becoming Labour Party Chair and Minister without Portfolio in 2006. Her career peaked ten years after her initial election when she became Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. In all, Blears held 4 different roles between 1997 and 2010, and in many ways, she was an unlikely success. Her background in local politics (as opposed to national-level activity) marked her out in a cabinet dominated by those with instrumental experience. Additionally, although not ‘old’ at the time of her election, she was not in the age group most destined for success

(those in their twenties and thirties at the time of being elected). Indeed, her first promotion was also insalubrious, only to the level of PPS, a stage which for many who make the same journey becomes their final destination. Overall, Hazel Blears was perhaps the odd one out in the higher echelons of British politics throughout the New Labour era, her devotion to the ideology of New Labour being a key driver behind her success.

Finally, some MPs who, on paper, would be ideal candidates for high ministerial office, only had stuttering parliamentary careers, reaching only the level of PPS, or remaining on the backbenches altogether. MPs with national-level pre-parliamentary political experience that fit this profile include Diana Organ, Harold Best, Roger Casale, and Gordon Marsden. The most high-profile, however, is Oona King.

Didn't meet expectations – Oona King (Lab)

Oona King was elected as MP for Bethnal Green and Bow with great expectations upon her. Becoming only the second black woman elected to the Commons, and doing so at the age of twenty-nine, saw King gain much media attention – talk of frontbench promotion soon followed. King, however, only ever made it as far as becoming a PPS. She was never a minister at any level of government. King's pre-parliamentary background lies firmly in national politics. She worked as an assistant to Labour members of the European Parliament, including Glenys Kinnock, and was then a political organiser for a regional section of the GMB union. Despite these gleaming credentials, King's ministerial career was a non-starter. In her diaries, now published, she reflects on an incident in late 1999 that she believes stymied her frontbench chances. Alastair Campbell, press secretary and all-round fixer for Prime Minister Tony Blair, asked King to include an attack on an opponent of the PM in a Commons speech of hers. She refused, after which Campbell suggested that she would remain a backbencher for the next five years as a result, this serving as a punishment for not obeying his word (King 2007, pp.115-116). The accuracy of this account is unclear, but it highlights that without the patronage and loyalty of those who control ministerial appointments, pre-parliamentary political experience may count for very little.

Summary – what political experience helps when and why?

The findings presented above and in chapter four demonstrate the varying impact of different types of pre-parliamentary political experience on political career trajectories post-election in the House of Commons. It has been shown that political experience gained on the national level is generally related to the optimal outcomes in terms of political career progression than local experience. Here, these findings will briefly be summarised in graphical form, providing an easily interpretable reference for the reader, as well as highlighting once again the differential impact of political experience on political career trajectories in the UK parliament. Figure 5.1 summarises the empirical findings of the thesis, all original contributions to the existing scholarly literature.

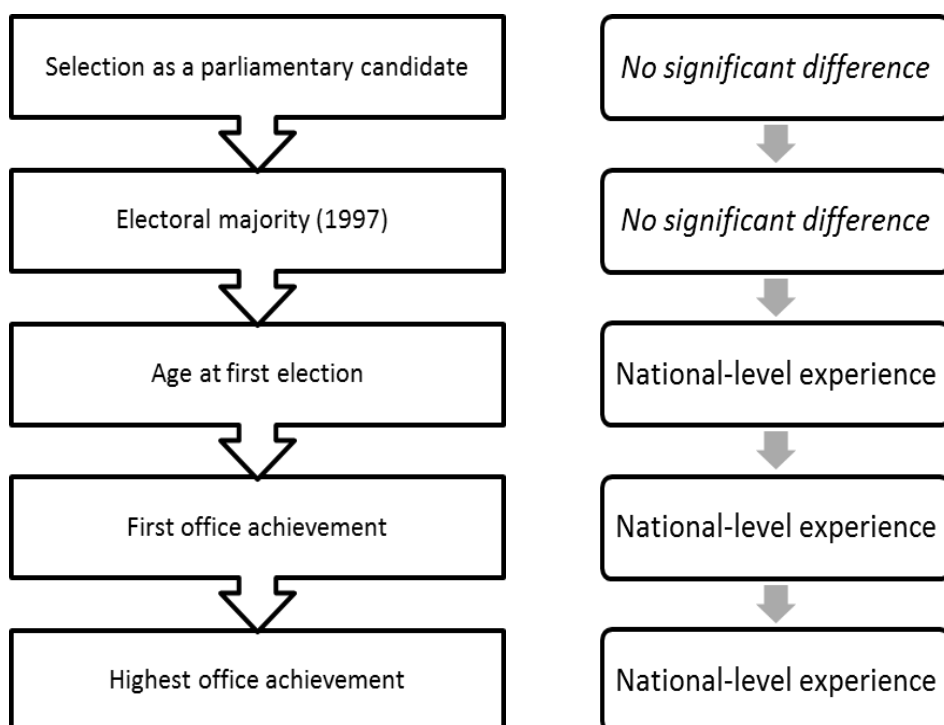


Figure 5.1 Optimal type of political experience for preferential career outcome by career stage.

Figure 5.1 highlights the ways in which national-level political experience acts as a boost to a successful political career, measured by frontbench office attainment. Two crucial points can be highlighted here, points which further underline the unique contribution this thesis and these findings make to the existing literature. First, the positive benefits of national-level experience compared to local experience only take hold *following* election to parliament, with figure 5.1 demonstrating that there is no difference in the outcomes for individuals with either type of experience in terms of

being selected for a parliamentary seat promptly, or in the electoral majority they hold upon election. Perhaps the sole pre-election difference is age, and it has been argued above that it is likely that age at the time of election is linked to the type of political experience held by a candidate. Second, developing this, these are findings that the existing literature, which does not link pre- and post-election patterns, would simply miss. Further to this, as underlined previously, by not distinguishing between these local and national types of pre-parliamentary political experience, the existing classification would additionally miss these findings in this way.

Why are MPs who hold national-level pre-parliamentary political experience more heavily concentrated in the highest offices of state than their colleagues with local-level political experience? Chapter two considered the question of why different types of political experience would provide different benefits across the course of a career, distinguishing between formal benefits such as knowledge of political process, informal benefits, primarily knowing the informal rules of the game as well as having numerous contacts across the political sphere, and then finally party loyalty, which could have been demonstrated in the course of gaining said experience (see figure 2.5 for a visual breakdown of this distinction). Additionally, chapter two distinguished between pre- and post-election stages, arguing that certain benefits might be of more use at certain stages of a career.

Revisiting these ideas in light of the empirical analysis of the previous two chapters is illuminating. For example, it does seem that only national-level experience will have a significant positive relationship with career attainment, but even this is only visible *after* an individual has been elected; that is, when they have become an MP. Neither type of experience affects their pathway into that position in a formal sense, although the data suggests that having national-level experience is related to being elected at a younger age. As was shown in chapter four, being elected young is a massive boost to the likelihood of making it to the top of the parliamentary food chain, and thus is worth considering in more detail. As was discussed in chapter two, and above, it could be the case that the informal contacts being made by those young aspirant politicians working in national-level political occupations aid them in their attempts to find a parliamentary seat which they can contest, and in turn results in their election at a younger age. At the same time, there might be a better ideological fit between these young individuals

and the national party leadership than between the same group and local councillors, who are likely to have been elected at an older age. Thus, it would make sense for the leadership to want to promote these young acolytes into higher office than it would to promote individuals who perhaps did not agree with their policies or approach to the same extent. Moreover, it could be that the knowledge they had gained from their experience at the national level helped them to know what it took to gain promotion to the top roles. Indeed, it is likely a combination of these various elements.

Conversely, why would their experience seem not to benefit those MPs with local-level pre-parliamentary political experience? Again, as noted above, this can be split into pre- and post-election impact. In terms of post-election benefits, these could be few and far between for those with local experience as local party operatives, namely local councillors, have previously been perceived by parties to be a liability in ideological terms, this being particularly true of New Labour under Tony Blair (Rush 2001; Shaw 2001). On a more practical level, MPs have honed their political skills on the local level and are going to have both formal knowledge and informal contacts which are concentrated at this level. Aside from interacting with the MP for their area, for example, many are going to have little direct experience of Westminster politics. Although many political skills are transferable, and indeed local councillors would already have experience of dealing with constituents who are their own, some of their skills and knowledge would be of little use in Westminster. They would have gained little knowledge of the workings of the House of Commons as an institution, for example, and there exists a literature which considers the ways in which new MPs adapt to the Commons from a sociological perspective (Searing 1985; Rush and Giddings 2011), though this does not consider how different routes into the Commons might affect behaviour once elected. The American literature on political amateurs argues that national-level politicians who have taken the step up from local politics are often less likely to succeed because they are saddled with the albatross of an existing legislative record (Canon 1990). Having passed laws, taken positions, and generally been a public political figure ties them to certain viewpoints which could possibly jeopardise their position relative to the national party leadership. Evidently, an individual who has worked in the backrooms of Westminster, potentially even for multiple MPs, is unlikely to have made as many public pronouncements about their views, and as such, can sidestep this problem, entering the Commons with a clean

sheet. Whether this is normatively a good thing is a different question, not one to be answered here, but it is easy to imagine outcry at the prospect of politicians who are tied to no particular viewpoint being prized above those who are more ideologically committed.²⁸ Regardless of the precise dynamics behind this pattern, the previous chapter and this one have provided empirical evidence that pre-parliamentary political experience affects career trajectories in the House of Commons, and not always in a positive way.

Conclusion

The previous chapter utilised regression analyses to operationalise variables relating to pre-parliamentary political experience, themselves drawn from the conceptual groundwork of earlier chapters, and established that these factors did have an effect on political career trajectories post-election but that there were other factors, such as age at time of election and electoral majority, which had a larger effect. A consistent theme of chapter four, however, was the contention that it is likely that these factors are linked with one another and interrelated to a certain extent.

This chapter developed these arguments and mapped the ways in which different types of pre-parliamentary political experience provide individuals with different interactions with these effects. For example, being young when first elected to the Commons was shown in chapter four to have a significant positive effect on overall career trajectory in parliament; this chapter has demonstrated that there are significant differences between the ages when elected of those MPs who hold political experience gained on the national level to those with local-level experience. In turn, this leaves them in a preferential position with regard to frontbench promotion. Conversely, the opposite is true of those MPs with locally-focused political experience. It has been shown that these MPs are elected at an older age than their colleagues, are not promoted at the same rate, with those who are promoted being promoted later in their parliamentary careers and into lower-ranked offices.

The next chapter, chapter six, will draw on all the material presented thus far in the thesis, both conceptual and empirical, to outline the potential for the concepts and

²⁸ This is an argument made by Colin Hay (2007, p. 119) who argues that this type of apoliticism is a by-product of neo-liberal economic arguments.

measures used in the thesis to be used in broader comparative studies of political careers.

Chapter Six –Political experience and the study of political careers in comparative political science

Thus far, I have argued the case for incorporating pre-parliamentary political experience into the study of political careers in Britain. I have grounded this case in existing work at the same time as developing a new conceptual framework. The framework is supported by empirical evidence which validates its usage. The contribution I make lies in three main areas; a) I show that political experience gained pre-election affects career trajectory once elected, b) that political experience is not homogenous and can be differentiated along local-national lines, and that c) this differentiation results in divergent outcomes in career trajectory. In the British case, these are all original contributions to existing knowledge.

In this chapter I develop the conceptual contributions of the thesis initially laid out in chapters two and three in the knowledge that these were supported and justified by empirical analysis. I ask how they could be applied to future comparative research on political careers, and consider the differential outcomes that such research might discover. This directly addresses the third research question posed in the introduction. I begin by outlining a chronology of political careers through which different types of political experience can be measured. Following this, I adapt the local-national distinction made earlier in the thesis for use in comparative work, underlining the broad applicability that such a distinction holds by drawing on existing international work. Having established the conceptual basis of the framework, I consider factors which will affect the ways in which political experience is both gained and deployed across different polities. Moving from the macro- to micro-level, the ways in which institutional design and political system, party type, and then individual-level characteristics, will affect the role of political experience in a system are considered.

Towards a holistic comparative account of political careers

The term political career variously invokes inter-institutional movement, intra-institutional hierarchy, political ambition and candidate selection. Generally studies

focus on one of these elements, either ignoring the rest, or incorporating one or two parts of them intermittently. I argue here that actually, political careers are *all* of these things, and more, and that the study of any of the above elements on their own also requires a consideration of the others. That is, any approach needs to be holistic. Although research is often by necessity carried out on smaller case studies, such work should be contextualised fully.

In addition to the split in focus detailed above, the comparative literature on political careers is notable in terms of both the European/US split, and again in terms of the split focus of these two respective areas. The European literature is largely concerned with legislatures and how politicians move between them and the US literature dedicated to patterns of entry and exit from institutions. Alongside this exists a considerable body of work which looks at intra-legislatorial activity, be it promotions, executive composition where relevant, retirements and exits of other kinds, more general behavioural studies relating to roll call voting and bill presentation, and then broader studies which examine candidate backgrounds in a number of ways such as in terms of sex, age, and so on.

For the most part, these studies take the individual as the point of analysis, the proverbial chess piece, and it is rather the scale and scope of the board that changes across studies. The concept of a multi-level system is accepted almost universally, with almost all countries featuring some sort of inter-level movement. It is likely that most politicians will have involvement at various levels of a political system during the course of a political career.

However, the focus on either inter-legislature movement *or* on intra-institutional trends of retirement, committee assignment, and so on, obscures the fact that in a system with multiple legislative institutions and people who move between them and within them, these things will affect each other. In short, this approach does not account for the effect of the legacy of experience in one legislature on progress in the next. Political experience is path dependent and cumulative. Hence I argue that accounts of political careers need to take political experience into consideration, and that this type of early engagement with politics may often set the path of trends that come to light at a later stage.

John R. Hibbing is a mainstay of US research on political careers and his numerous studies of congressional careers provide the basis for more recent work which looks at political careers in a broader way (Herrnson 1994; Lawless and Fox 2005). Hibbing is known for his longitudinal studies of the legislative careers of members of Congress (1991), but it is his later meditations on both the justification for, and future of, the study of legislative careers that I will briefly address here. In his article 'Legislative careers: Why and how we should study them', Hibbing identifies four guiding principles behind existing work on legislative careers. Firstly, 'understanding legislator motivation', essentially the problematic of political ambition – who runs for office, why, and who doesn't? Secondly, 'understanding a certain legislative body', something he sees as a question of institutionalisation, 'the complexity, boundedness, and stable structure of a body'. Thirdly, 'understanding a certain socio-political system', mainly *who* runs for office, and *which* offices they run for. Additionally he here identifies studies of post-legislative careers, arguing that these too form part of the opportunity structure of a socio-political system. Finally, 'generalizing across socio-political systems', which is comparative work looking at how different variables impact on the systemic outcomes visible – for example, what encourages more women to run for office?, how does the electoral system affect who runs for office?, and so on (Hibbing 1991). In summary, Hibbing is keen to promote an institutional focus, seeing political career studies as a useful way into the issue of institutional change.

Borchert (2011) proposes a synthesis of sorts between this institutional focus of, for example, Hibbing (1999) and those studies which focus exclusively on the legislative careers of individuals within a given legislature, such as Hibbing's earlier longitudinal study of congressional careers (Hibbing 1991). Following such logic, I will first establish a chronology of political careers, emphasising that they begin prior to an individual entering a legislature, and that differences in experience, even at this preliminary stage, will affect later trajectories. I therefore start by establishing various measurements of political experiences at different stages of a political career. Moving on from this, the second, and main, section of the chapter looks at how these various types of political experience will affect political careers at different stages dependent on the political system an actor exists within, the type of political party they are a member of, and then finally, their own personal characteristics. In this way, the

analysis moves from the macro to the micro level, from systemic to personal factors. The aim of the chapter is to provide a wide-ranging account of how comparative political science research could operationalise variables relating to political experience, and what findings could be expected as a result.

What is political experience and *when* will it have an effect?

In chapter two, it was noted that various studies of legislative behaviour and/or careers around the world utilise different conceptions of what political experience is, and how to measure it. What this literature lacks is a way of classifying these different types of political experience. It should be noted that although these definitions and operationalisations differ, none are ‘wrong’, as such, and it is useful to consider them alongside each other (as has been done in this thesis). Initially, it is possible to break down these different conceptions of political experience by their location in the (temporal) process of a political career. Adapting figure 3.1 is figure 6.1 below.

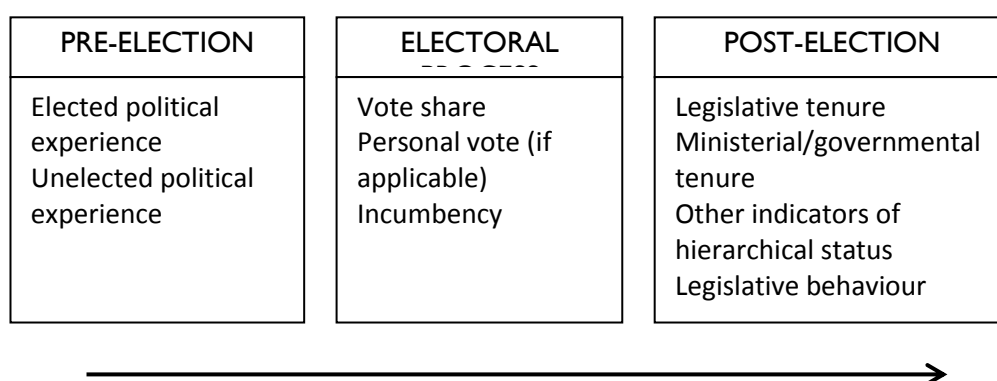


Figure 6.1 Measures of political experience by career stage.²⁹

As noted in chapter three, there is often different emphasis on the different stages of a career in various studies. For example, work on US congressional careers tends to focus on the electoral process as the source of experience in addition to legislative tenure, a

²⁹ For the purposes of empirical application, it is assumed here that candidates at a given election are being studied (election *x*) and therefore electoral experience would have been gained at elections of any kind prior to election *x*. However, elected experience could be drawn from elections for party office (as detailed by Montero, 2007, for example) as much as from election for public office. In reality, the application of such a framework to empirical work would need to be moderated by the researcher using it.

post-election factor (Hibbing 1991). Classifying various measures of political experience in this way also raises again the question of path dependency – is it not likely to be the case that many of the factors above, across all three stages, are linked? For example, as described in chapter two, having pre-legislative political experience of various kinds will provide an aspirant politician with different types of information, information which may go on to affect their choice of electoral contest, for one. In other words, if I am considering running for national office, and know people within my party who provide me with proprietary information that a certain parliamentarian is retiring from his safe seat soon for whatever reason, I will likely allow this to influence my subsequent choices in terms of selecting which seat to fight for selection (as a candidate) in. The key point here is that this would be *prior* to the electoral process, and borne of possessing a specific type of pre-legislative political experience. Thus, utilising a measure of political experience based on electoral factors alone is not necessarily measuring solely that.

This thesis has made the case for acknowledging pre-legislative political experience as something worth considering in greater detail in legislative studies, and thinking about all types of political experience in a systematic way (as in figure 6.1) highlights why this is necessary. But within the ‘pre-election’ category, how should political scientists consider different types of political experience which occur prior to a candidate even entering the electoral process? Chapter two argued that distinctions between elected and unelected experience, local- and national-level experience, and between partisan and non-partisan experience were useful, certainly in the British example. To what extent can these be generalised to a broader series of cases? The key intervention that this thesis makes in this discussion is in many ways a basic one; simply to point out that not all political experience is the same, and not all political experience is, *de facto*, equal. It will have different effects at different points within a political career, and so far, this chapter has laid out a way of thinking about both the temporal aspect of this, as well as a framework for thinking in more detail about how political experience can differ. For the purposes of the latter, it has distinguished between elected and unelected experience, national and local level experience, and partisan or non-partisan experience shown in figure 6.2.³⁰

³⁰ Local is additionally referred to as ‘sub-national’ here, owing to the prominence of regional and state political bodies across Europe and the US.

Local (sub-national)		National	
Elected	Unelected	Elected	Unelected
Partisan/non-partisan		Partisan/non-partisan	

Figure 6.2 Different types of political experience.

Casting an eye over the examples of existing work presented in chapter three reveals these three distinctions to be in use, in some way, in scholarship on countries other than Britain. There is a divergence between politicians who gain political experience in an elected capacity, for example at local, regional, or state level, and those who gain their experience by working in politics in some way. For example, writing about the US, David Canon distinguishes between Congressmen and Congresswomen who had executive, legislative, legal, administrative/bureaucratic, or party experience (1990, pp.165-166). Similarly, Spanish politicians can gain political experience from an equally diverse series of positions, both elected and unelected, and at various levels of the national political structure (Montero 2007). Thus, a distinction can be made here between elected and unelected experience, national- or local-level experience, and then partisan or non-partisan experience. These different types of experience can be applied to the three stages detailed in figure 6.1. Experience is likely to have an impact at the different stages outlined in figure 6.1. For example, an individual's pre-electoral experience of politics is likely to colour both their outlook as well as reflect their own, prior, perceptions of what politics is and how to be successful in it (Canon 1990, p.21-22). Canon, building on Harold Laswell's earlier work, contends that amateurs (those lacking prior political experience of any kind) are likely to be more 'adaptable' than their colleagues who have been in politics for the long haul, becoming political at a young age (1990, pp.22-24).

Building on this, I will now consider *where* different political experience is likely to have different effects – under what political systems will local experience trump national-level experience, and vice versa? Is being a political amateur the death knell for a candidacy in some countries but the catalyst for one in another? Are all of these processes different for men and women? In the following section of the chapter I will draw on the limited available evidence in the literature, as well as the findings of this

thesis, to speculate as to where political experience might have differential impacts on career trajectories.

Understanding where it will have an effect

This section will move from the macro to the micro in terms of understanding the interaction of political experience and political careers, focusing on the individual level, the party level, and finally the system level. Underlying this approach are three contentions;

1. Political experience will have a differential effect depending on the political system of a country, its structure and rules, and the nature of its party system;
2. Political experience will have a differential effect by party (for reasons of ideology, age, and structure);
3. Political experience will have a differential effect for individuals from different social and personal backgrounds.

Thus, the effect of political experience will differ along these lines as well and it is through the prism of these three statements that this difference will be considered.

1. By political system & institutional design

The structure and nature of a political system will affect the ways in which different types of political experience affect career trajectories within it. It should be noted that it is taken as given that the system being studied is a democracy (i.e. that there does actually exist an opportunity structure which is at least formally open to the majority of citizens should they wish to run for public political office).

As noted above, the multi-level nature of many political systems is now accepted within the literature, and it is acknowledged that politicians will often move between these various levels, or straddle them with memberships of institutions on multiple levels (Borchert and Stolz 2011). Building on this, Jens Borchert sees political careers as 'being shaped by the interplay of individual ambition and the institutional structure of opportunities' (2011, p.117). That is, politicians have to *want* to progress in a career, and there has to be opportunity for them to do this, in order for it to happen, but that

‘the territorial structure of the state clearly does influence career chances and career decisions by providing one decisive dimension of the playing field’ (2011, p.124). Borchert acknowledges the role of path dependency here, with many individuals following in the footsteps of those who went before them (2011, p.118). At the heart of his argument is that the fact that political institutions at any level are filled with individuals who may have served in other office previously and may hold ambitions of serving in another in future will affect both the behaviour of these individuals and the institutions they inhabit (Borchert 2011, p.118).

Borchert proposes two planks to studying political careers in multi-level systems – these are that institutional structures in given political systems will affect politicians’ career choices (based on the availability, accessibility, and attractiveness of different offices) and then in turn that these decisions will affect which institutions are linked with which in that polity. Going on to classify the different ideal types that the structure of a polity can be identified as, Borchert proposes that ‘there may be a clear hierarchy, there may be separate arenas largely sealed off from each other, or there may be a large playing field with very little hierarchy or a hierarchy that cuts across levels of government’, with this differing across federal and unitary systems, for example (2011, p.118, p.124).

So how can the movement of individual politicians between various levels of a political system, and political career opportunity structure, be classified? Borchert describes systems as unidirectional, integrated, or alternative (Borchert 2011), essentially asking what are the ‘predominant direction of career movements’ in a state and highlighting the ‘institutional orientations’ on offer to politicians in each, be they legislative or executive (Borchert and Stolz 2011, p.272, p.275). It is clear that these institutional orientations are shifting, with regionalisation in previously exclusively unitary states (such as the UK) providing new career paths for politicians to follow if they wish (Keating and Cairney 2006; Borchert 2011). As a result, Borchert argues that ‘the prototypical polity that centres purely on the national capital and thus may be legitimately considered a one-arena game has virtually disappeared from the scene in all but the smallest democracies’ (2011, p.124).³¹ The extent to which sub-national

³¹ Despite this, it is possible to argue that although there are now more options available to aspirant politicians in the UK (e.g. the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, London Assembly

legislatures are professionalised will affect their standing in the national hierarchy: if they provide an income comparable to the time demands they place on members, they are likely to be more viable career options than if they are only semi-professionalised (Borchert 2011, p.124). For example, in Germany, regional and local legislatures have professionalised to a greater extent than the UK equivalent of local or county councils, and this in turn affects their membership and the ways that their members use them in the course of a political career.

The location of the executive, and the link between legislative politics and executive politics, also differs across polities. If serving in a legislature from which the executive is drawn, and where both legislative and executive can be held concurrently, for many legislators, 'to an extent, the ultimate career aim in almost all parliamentary systems is the executive, as this is a post that is generally held on top of the parliamentary mandate rather than instead' (Borchert and Stolz 2011, p.275). The extent to which non-executive career paths within a legislature are developed will affect this rationale, however, as will the relative power of government and parliament (Borchert 2011, p.125). In the UK, for example, the select committee system is gradually becoming a serious alternative to an executive career, and thus there is, to a certain extent, a rationale for remaining in the House of Commons for a long time, even if only a backbencher (Benton and Russell 2012). Conversely, David Docherty highlights the fact that in Canada, although institutionally similar to the UK, the government is very large relative to parliament, and thus if an MP is not recruited into the executive relatively early in their career, there is little utility in them remaining there and accruing seniority (Docherty 1997; Borchert 2011). The US Congress offers a counterpoint to this to a certain extent, with clear executive and legislative separation resulting in a situation where legislators are generally unlikely to be considering a move from their legislative role to an executive one. Borchert notes that being a US secretary, in the cabinet appointed by the president, 'has to be considered the dead-end of regular political careers in the USA' (Borchert 2011, p.125). However, legislators may use their longevity in Congress to either make a step up from the House of Representatives to the Senate, or to mount a bid for governorship of their home state, probably a more powerful

and Mayoralty, Westminster is still the place to go for ambitious politicians, and there is only sporadic travel in the opposite direction (i.e. from Westminster to the sub-national parliaments and assemblies).

position, certainly in states such as California. Such regional positions are often the recruitment point for top executive roles – for example, US Presidents such as Bill Clinton (Arkansas), Ronald Reagan (California), and George W. Bush (Texas) held gubernatorial positions prior to entering the Whitehouse, and many German chancellors have been drawn from regional prime ministerial roles as opposed to the national legislature (Borchert 2011).

The differential movement of politicians within political systems, even systems which are relatively similar to one another, will affect the way in which political experience is gained and the effect it has on career trajectory. Take, for example, a vertical system, one where politicians are attempting to head to the top of the pile, a national-level legislature, and where there exists a clear hierarchy of offices (Copeland and Opheim 2011). In such a system, political experience is likely to be something pursued, gained, then moved on from – that is, it is unlikely that politicians will collect political experience *cumulatively*, but rather see it in distinct stages, dropping their affiliation to lesser offices once in place in more powerful ones. In Britain, for example, it is rare to see MPs with multiple mandates, very few holding other political office at the local or supra-national level alongside their parliamentary office. Partially, this is due to such a practice being discouraged by political parties, particularly the Labour party, but equally, politicians likely see no potential benefit in holding these dual mandates, as neither offer an equivalent status to the MP should he or she lose their seat. Equally, the same is true of the United States, another uni-directional system.

Within such systems, once politicians have moved from local to national level political roles, experience shifts from holding, or seeking election to, multiple electoral offices, and becomes about intra-institutional longevity, about behaving in a way that is palatable to the gatekeepers of executive office, or other higher legislative office, as opposed to a broader electorate. As such, referencing figure 6.1, the gaining of experience shifts firmly into the post-election phase (barring general elections every few years), whereas in an integrated system such as that in the United States, experience will continue to be sought in the pre-election and electoral phases for longer, with candidates drawing experience from a multitude of sources.

The electoral cycle will also affect the ways in which political experience affects career trajectories. Firstly, knowledge of an upcoming election will provoke some sort of candidate selection effort. More subtle, however, will be the effect of prolonged periods in either government or opposition for a political party. Nicole Bolleyer, writing about cartel parties, notes that prolonged periods in opposition tend to result in substantial 'organisation-building' by parties, whereas periods in government result in the opposite (2009, p.562). Returning to the specific case study analysed in this thesis, the 1997 election saw the end of a long time in opposition for the Labour party – as such, by this point the party had developed a significant party membership as well as cultivated a notable presence in local politics. As a consequence, many of these local councillors then stood as parliamentary candidates and won.

Other smaller considerations are also worth mentioning. Borchert notes that in many countries, the bureaucratic arm of the state is highly politicised and provides a 'fall back in case of electoral defeat' or an 'additional *de facto* political office' (2011, p.124), this being the case in France, Germany, and a number of South American countries. Evidently, in the UK, this is not a widespread phenomenon, with civil service neutrality remaining resolutely strong at the time of writing.

Finally, the electoral system will also affect career choices, and how political experience is pursued and deployed. Distinguishing between the selectorate and the electorate, those who select candidates and those who can choose to elect them, respectively, Borchert notes that the selectorate can act as a 'safety net between representatives and voters' (2011, p.126). The insinuation here is that, dependent on the electoral system, a politician needs to keep different groups of people loyal to his or her candidacy and cause. For example, with a first-past-the-post system, or a closed list PR system, party selectorates, rather than the electorate, hold power over politicians, and thus the loyalty of a politician should be to either local or national party leadership (Borchert 2011, p.126). This will differ by party type, however, and this is something I will now address.

2. By party type

The relative utility of different types of political experience will differ dependent on party type, defined, *inter alia*, by the structure of the party, its ideology, and genealogy.

Political parties have been classified extensively over the past century, often in a disparate and unlinked fashion. As such, to attempt to discuss the implications of all of these different party types on political careers would be well beyond the scope of this thesis, let alone this chapter. Instead, I adopt the integrated classification of party types put forward by André Krouwel (2006) and briefly discuss how these five different models of political party might relate to the different types of political experience discussed earlier in the chapter. The key questions here are; (1) would certain party types be predisposed to value certain types of political experience over others?; and (2) what is the likely impact of this on individual-level political career trajectories? For the purposes of this discussion, it is assumed that we are analysing parliamentary systems where the executive is broadly drawn from within the national legislature. Other types of political institutional arrangements and their implications for political careers and political experience will be discussed at the end of this section of the chapter.

Krouwel, surveying the vast literature which classifies political parties along various lines, identifies three core trends and then attempts to condense these into an integrated typology which addresses them simultaneously. He highlights work which focuses on organisational structure, using this as a tool of distinction (this includes, for example, Katz and Mair 1995), other work which looks at the 'genera' or origins of parties and uses this to differentiate them (Krouwel 2006, p.250), and then work which using more abstract measures including the function of a party, or its broad political goals. Building on these existing classifications, of which there are in excess of thirty, Krouwel argues that in reality, there is much crossover between a number of these, and it is possible to condense these multiple approaches and outcomes into five core 'species' of party (2006, p.250).

These are loosely structured elite-led cadre parties, mass parties, electoralist parties, cartel parties, and business firm parties (Krouwel 2006, pp.250-253). Of the five, only the final three, according to Krouwel, are still in action, with the cadre and mass parties dying out in the 1920s and 1950s, respectively. It should be noted, however, that these are ideal-typical party models, and as such, it is rare to find a perfectly congruent fit between the theory and reality. So what are these three remaining party types, and how will they affect the ways in which political experience will be used by politicians within them?

The existing literature doesn't consider, in any systematic way, whether political career paths will differ by party type. Addressing this question provides an opportunity to unite the body of work studying political careers with the enormous canon focused on political parties. Additionally, it can help provide a toolkit that future research can employ on a comparative scale. The pros and cons of Krouwel's framework will not be debated here. Rather, this framework will be adopted as a route into the study of how political careers and political parties interrelate, providing a way into this complex issue which compromises neither the main focus of this chapter, nor its bounded length.

Firstly, there is the catch-all electoralist party, a party type which has been visible since 1950 according to Krouwel. This party type has grown out of the previous 'mass party', which itself came into being extra-legislatively, although as Krouwel notes, the inventor of the term 'catch-all' party, Otto Kirchheimer, was rather non-specific in terms of defining the term or providing its identifying features in a systematic way (2006, pp.256-258). Broadly, the various models which Krouwel classifies as part of the catch-all electoralist stable focus on elements such as the collapse of widespread party membership, the professionalisation of old party bureaucracies, and a process of de-ideologisation, whereby parties attempt to broaden their electoral constituency to include large swathes of the electorate as opposed to traditional pitches made to certain sections of society (Krouwel 2006).

The second party type still in existence is the cartel party, a classification popularised by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995). Krouwel, drawing on the work of Kirchheimer as well as Katz and Mair, identifies three types of cartelisation seen in systems containing cartel parties. First, inter-party cartelisation, whereby a small group of established parties move to exclude potential competitors from entering political competition; second is party-state cartelisation, a process which sees the boundaries between party and state shrinking, with politics becoming largely about the management of the state by politicians (this being the closest definition to the prominent Katz and Mair cartel thesis); third is a party-state cartel but with the addition of powerful interest groups, with parties attempting to gain the support of voters through these types of groups rather than by more traditional methods (Krouwel 2006, pp.258-259). In many ways, it is perhaps Kirchheimer's work rather than Katz and Mair's that is of note to the enquiry

of this thesis. Structurally, cartel parties are notable for being atomistic, with the parliamentary party, central office, and local grassroots party all being relatively autonomous (Krouwel 2006, p.260).

Finally, there is the business-firm party model, a 'recent phenomenon in Europe but not on the American continent' (Krouwel 2006, p.260). This party type is split into two broad categories – where existing corporations are utilised for political purposes and those other cases where a new organisation is created specifically for a political purpose. An example of the former is *Forza Italia*, Italian politician Silvio Berlusconi's political party (Krouwel 2006, p.60). These organisations are top-heavy, with no grassroots party really existing outside of elections at which time it may be rapidly assembled to act in a cheerleading capacity. For the most part, members of the party will also be politicians elected as part of it, sitting in parliament. A focus on personalities at the top of the party provides much free media publicity, but equally leaves the party vulnerable to the changing winds of public opinion – if the leader falls from grace, the party may rapidly follow (Krouwel 2006, pp.260-262).

So would any of these broad party types either explicitly or implicitly privilege certain types of political experience? The development of these party types over time is perhaps a useful way to consider the interrelation of these two factors. For example, the origins of catch-all electoralist parties, which grew out of existing mass parties, highlights how the parties have shifted in terms of both organisation, as well as personnel. Mass parties relied heavily on grassroots members, and as these members drifted away for whatever reason, the catch-all electoralist party that has risen from their ashes has increasingly come to rely on political professionals to fulfil functions that previous would have been undertaken, in part, by members. Is it possible to paint this as a shift from the local to the national? At the same time, are cartel parties more likely to select candidates who have experience of national-level political administration, and are business-firm parties equally keen on those candidates with expertise from the top level of national, or even international, political life?

With reference to figure 6.1, it is possible to consider the potential benefits to both parties and candidates at different stages of a political career. For example, for certain parties, candidates with certain types of experience will offer benefits at the electoral

stage, whilst others may be of greater use once elected to a legislature. Concurrently, for candidates, certain experience may aid their initial selection as a party candidate, whilst other types may not. To flesh out this discussion, I will again turn to the example of the UK. The British Labour party, arguably a catch-all electoralist party with roots as a mass party, is one which has seen intense debate surrounding candidate selection in recent decades, a debate discussed in detail in chapter two. At the crux of this debate is a local-national split, with actors at the centre of the party valuing different characteristics in parliamentary candidates to those at the periphery. A further variable which has been thrown into the mix more recently is that of localism, the desire of political parties to present 'local' candidates to the electorate, and seemingly the desire of the electorate to vote for these individuals, or at least the option to (Childs and Cowley 2011). Let us imagine a scenario in which an MP in a safe Labour seat retires for health reasons, leaving open a highly-prized route to parliament for one individual; in a case such as this, it is almost certain that whoever the local party selects as a candidate will become the next MP for the constituency in question. It is likely that the local party will be keen to select a local stalwart as a reward of sorts for good service, perhaps a local councillor or someone else who is perceived to share their views. At the same time, the national party may have designs on the seat in terms of 'parachuting' either a favoured adviser of a national-level politician, or relocating a senior MP who holds a precarious electoral position. However, they will also be conscious of the need to maintain the appearance that the candidate would be a good local MP. Childs and Cowley note the rise in the number of MPs claiming local links to the area which they represent, and it is possible that the ability to claim links on a wide range of areas, including having familial links to the area, or even having moved there recently, perhaps dilutes the argument in favour of selecting a local stalwart (2011). That is, why pick a local stalwart whose main virtue is being local when being local is something that can effectively be claimed by almost any candidate? Such developments open the door for candidates who *haven't* got that type of local experience to circumvent the issue by claiming it in a more abstract way, however spuriously.

Inherent in this scenario is the fact that nature of the Labour party, and indeed the modern British Conservative party, is the importance of members – although dwindling in number, neither party want to alienate the people who help maintain their political power. Thus, the party type, and the genealogy of this party type, influences the ways

in which political experience manifest across the various stages of a political career, from selection to election to promotion, from political cradle to political grave. Katz notes that candidate selection processes raise 'central questions about the ideological and sociological identities' of parties and that 'different models of selection are likely to privilege different elements of the party and different types of candidates' (2001, p.277). Following the selection and election stages, the power of political patronage shifts from membership to party leadership, again shifting the potential effect of experience on a political career, something discussed at length in chapter two. One of the key things to note here is the separation of these two groups – the selectorate at the local level is not the same group of people heading up the parliamentary party and the spheres of influence of these two groups differ.

Would such effects be visible in a cartel party? Elements of the cartel ideal-type are visible in the three main parties in Britain, but it is possible to look further afield to assess this, as well as to speculate based on the body of theoretical work that exists on cartelisation. Katz observes that for MPs of a cartel party, there exists a 'puzzle, whereby these individuals constitute both the party in public office as well as the party on the ground', lying 'midway' between these two groups (2001, p.277). In terms of candidate selection processes, they are between a rock and a hard place. Thinking about political recruitment from the standpoint of a candidate hoping to enter elected politics through a cartel party, it seems that the best course of action is to ensure that you are attractive at best, and palatable at worst, to the national party leadership. Why this focus on the national rather than local party? Katz speculates that one way or another, the leaders of cartel parties are going to exert increasing power over candidate selection, either directly, through making procedural changes and limiting the actual choice of candidates put forward to local party groups, or indirectly, by expanding the selectorate to dilute the influence of local party activists (2001, pp.292-294). Similarly, Nicole Bolleyer speculates that 'party unity in public office risks erosion when organisational boundaries are fluid and national elites cease to influence candidate selection' (2009, p.562). In many ways, these actions are the response of party leaders to changing circumstances which, it seems to them, only they can see – their needs have changed, the needs of the members of the ground have not; they see politics increasingly in terms of technical expertise and state management and specialism in these is more highly-valued than, for example, local service or ideological

fervour (Katz 2001, p.288). Thus, as opposed to when attempting to enter politics through a catch-all style party, where popularity with both the local and national party was the key to electoral and political success, those prospective candidates for cartel parties might be forgiven for focusing their gaze solely on the national party, for that is the locus of power and influence within the party, both pre- and post-election.

	Catch-all electoralist party	Cartel party	Business-firm party
Pre-election (i.e. candidate selection)	Local	National	National/personal link to leadership
Post-election (i.e. political promotion)	National	National	Personal link to leadership

Figure 6.3 Optimal political experience for individual candidates in parliamentary systems by political career stage and party type.

Klaus Detterbeck notes that the professionalisation of politicians, in the sense that politics is their sole/primary occupation and main source of income, breeds cartelisation, something also a core element of the Katz and Mair cartel thesis (Katz and Mair 1995; Detterbeck 2005, pp.188-189). I would also argue that it is likely to create a feedback loop of sorts, with politicians who hold positions of power within the party in public office keen to bring in more politicians who resemble themselves, perhaps even to strengthen their position collectively when negotiating their continued survival in political life. Katz writes that ‘there is a shared professional community so that members can easily recognise who does, and does not, belong’ (2001, p.288). Evidently, such attitudes will permeate both the perception and reality of political career trajectories within a party.

It would be remiss not to mention ideology explicitly at this point, tricky a subject as it is, for it is highly likely that the ideology of parties, at least at their point of foundation, will affect the social composition and overall ethos of the organisation, in turn influencing its values. For example, the British Labour party had a long tradition of selecting working-class, local, candidates, a tradition that has fallen away in recent

decades. However, it is perhaps the recognition that this tradition did once exist within the party that it currently agonises over the political representation of such groups on the Labour benches.

Thirdly, the business-firm party type – how will political experience play out in such a party? These parties seem to be less present in most Western European countries than the other party types discussed here, and as such will not act as the vehicle which many aspirant politicians use to further their careers. However, in one sense, the link between these parties and political experience can be drawn quite clearly – these parties are led from the top, often focusing heavily on the personality of the leader, and in this sense, having political experience on the national level, and expertise that will aid the party at the national level, will likely be the most useful. Surveying the literature, it is evident that candidate selection processes in these parties amount to little more than recruitment by the elite of the party (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999, p.312). In the cases of the *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD) in Spain and Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI) in Italy, candidates were often drawn from commercial and business contacts held by firms and businesses related to the leader: for example FI utilised *Fininvest*, a financial company controlled by Berlusconi, to recruit electoral candidates (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999, p.324). In cases such as these, it is not even evident that political experience of any kind is a prerequisite to selection by a business firm party, with corporate, business, and commercial expertise being valued more highly (Krouwel 2006, p.261).

Before turning to how individual-level characteristics interact with political experience, I will briefly look at the US example as it offers a number of counterpoints to the Western European party models discussed above. The use of primaries means that although candidates are not prey to the stumbling blocks presented by more formalised party structures, as seen above, individuals face other barriers to candidacy, such as financial funding or lack thereof (Copeland and Opheim 2011, p.146). Gary Copeland and Cynthia Opheim note that although Members of Congress avoid selectorates in the traditional catch-all or cartel party sense, 'the biggest check on the exercise of ambition by US politicians is the money-givers', thus running for office becomes a question of fund-raising ability as much as anything else (2011, p.146). What are the implications of such a situation for political experience? Copeland and

Opheim posit that fund-raising ability is in some way linked to reputation-building in the sense that donors are probably more likely to give money to a candidate who they think can win (2011, p.146). There are parallels here with the Western European examples discussed above – in those cases, rather than financial support, party actors were giving logistical support and the general power of the party machine to a candidate. So how can candidates prove their credibility? Copeland and Opheim argue that the role of state legislator is the ‘most direct and reliable way for potential contributors to take their measure of a candidate’, with state legislators having ‘a track record that establishes relationships as well as one’s ability, credibility and reliability’ (2011, p.126). Returning to the various benefits of pre-parliamentary political experience detailed in figure 2.5, elements of formal political knowledge and informal political contacts (as well as party loyalty to a certain extent) are inherent in Copeland and Opheim’s description. Congress has also seen a growth in Members who have backgrounds in instrumental political occupations, national-level unelected roles which are mostly partisan, and evidence suggests that these candidates perform disproportionately well in elections (Herrnson 1994). Are they able to fundraise at the same levels as their colleagues from state legislatures? Paul S. Herrnson identifies two distinct benefits that these types of political staffers have over state or local legislators. Firstly, they are not tied to any specific policy decisions they may have made in the past, and as such, have ‘none of the negative baggage’ associated with this; secondly, there is less political risk for these staffers as they are not relinquishing one political office to run for a higher one: losing the election will likely damage them less (1994, p.140). Looking at electoral success in Congressional primaries, Herrnson finds that ‘candidates who once for Congress as staff have a greater probability of winning a primary than any other type of candidate’ (1994, p.145). Could this be the result of superior fundraising? Not exactly – Congressional staff candidates do not raise as much money as their colleagues from state legislatures, but they do raise more than other types of candidate, such as political amateurs or other unelected party officials, and as such, are perceived to have a good chance of success in general, as opposed to primary, elections (Herrnson 1994, p.147).

In summary, different party types, identified through differential structural, organisational, and ideological patterns, provide unique incentives which will affect

both the ways in which political experience is gained as well as deployed. In turn, this will result in differential outcomes for individuals across different parties.

3. On an individual level

The European literature discussed previously (Borchert 2011; Borchert and Stolz 2011, 2011), although perhaps less institutionally-minded than the work of Hibbing, for example, still does not explicitly engage with the idea that institutions might work in different ways for different people dependent on personal characteristics. It is no longer a point of real contention to state that politics is experienced in different ways by different individuals, often along lines of sex, ethnicity, or other personal and social characteristics. Similarly, political experience will differ along such lines, with certain types of experience, or routes into politics, presenting themselves as more or less opportune for different people. Each individual wanting to enter political life will have to first contend with the systemic and party-level structures and processes outlined above. But even taking those as read, not all individuals can approach politics equally.

For example, there is a significant body of research which highlights the ways in which women experience the political process in different ways to men, and how other individual-level differences manifest as political inequalities (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Puwar 2004; Lawless and Fox 2005; Krook 2009; Allen 2012; Lawless 2012). This work has highlighted, amongst other things, the fact that women are less likely to consider running for office than similarly-placed men, that once within the political system women are less likely to put themselves forward for higher office, that women will be treated differently to their male colleagues, and that women are in many cases less likely to reach the very top of political life than men. Although more limited in number, studies have also shown similar patterns to be in place for politicians from ethnic minority backgrounds (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Puwar 2004; Durose et al. 2012).

Thinking about political experience, how will social characteristics such as these affect both the types of political experience that individuals are likely to gain as well as the effect it will have on their career? A useful way of conceptualising the relationship between these things is through the model of supply and demand first mentioned in

chapter one (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Taking again the example of women, it has been argued in the past that local politics, and in this case gaining political experience on the local level, is more conducive to women as it allows for an easier combination of political life with family life, offering closer proximity to home than a national-level political role (Briggs 2000; Allen 2012). Conversely, it is also possible to argue that non-traditional, national-level, types of political experience may be women-friendly in other ways. Although in terms of proximity to home and working hours they may be disagreeable, these routes allow women to bypass potentially patriarchal structures such as those seen on local councils, for example (Briggs 2000). The national-level route into politics, embodied, *inter alia*, in working for an MP, requires the support of a sole gatekeeper (the MP in question) as opposed to navigating selection and election to a local council, which is then itself dominated by men (Allen 2012). Other examples here would include trade unions and constituency parties. In this way, political experience is gendered, and this possibility can be broadened to include ethnicity, disability, and so on. Again, experiences of politics will differ for different people, and by definition, so will the types of political experience that they gain. Thus, the supply of political experience has the potential to be stratified by other characteristics held by an individual (i.e. sex, age, ethnicity, and so on). Consequentially, if political parties are looking for certain types of candidates (see the previous section of this chapter), the demand for different types of political experience, or indeed individuals with differing characteristics, will alter accordingly.

Say, for example, a political party wanted to professionalise its image and put the word out to local parties that selecting local party stalwarts was no longer encouraged, would this be good for women or ethnic minority candidates? Potentially yes. In cases where these debates have taken place, women candidates are often seen (rightly or wrongly) as the 'professional' choice, in opposition to the 'local man' (Childs and Cowley 2011). However, it is the case that women or ethnic minority candidates are less likely to have been local council stalwarts for a party, with both of these groups disproportionately leaving, for example, local council roles after just one term, with fewer white men doing the same (Allen 2012). A key point to make here is that changing political winds at the national level (i.e. changes in the preferences of parties for certain types of candidates) will create a feedback loop whereby certain types of political experience are deemed more desirable or effective for prospective candidates,

but as discussed here, not all prospective candidates will necessarily be able to gain such experience in the same way. Particularly at a time when these types of ‘political apprenticeships’ are increasingly essential to a political career, their differential effect will influence who makes it in politics and who does not.

Turning to political careers and personal characteristics in the broader sense, certain parties are more likely to adopt equality-seeking measures which may rectify this imbalance to some extent. Across the globe, measures which either pursue greater sex equality in elected office, or guarantee it (such as electoral quotas), are more regularly seen in left-wing parties than liberal or conservative parties, although it would be a fallacy to suggest that right-wing parties never adopt such measures (Krook 2010). As such, it is fair to say that certain parties are perhaps more likely to be aware of the ways that individual-level characteristics can affect the ways in which political processes work in different ways for different people. As a result of this, they will put in place mechanisms which alter these processes in some way.

Conclusion

This chapter began by presenting a systematic framework with which to analyse political experience and its effects, consisting firstly of a chronology of political careers (figure 6.1), and secondly of a distinction between various types of political experience, beginning with a distinction between national and sub-national experience before moving to further delineate elected and unelected experience as well as partisan and non-partisan roles (figure 6.2).

In this chapter I have extended the empirical and conceptual developments made throughout the thesis and theorised as to how they could be applied to a broader comparative literature, the focus being on the transferability of the concepts. These concepts have been related to wider conceptual work in the field of the study of political parties, representation, gender and politics, and to the existing literature looking at multi-level political careers. In doing this, I have provided a conceptual framework which could be employed empirically to the study of political experience and political careers in any democratic country.

This exercise additionally underlines the original scholarly contributions of the thesis, highlighting the ways in which this work advances extant scholarship, but retains its links to it. In the following chapter, the conclusion of the thesis, I will consider the implications of this work to broader political science literatures, as well as its potential practical policy implications. Finally, I will acknowledge the limitations of the thesis and lay down markers for future research.

Conclusion

The title of this thesis asks what the impact of pre-parliamentary political experience is on MPs career trajectories in the House of Commons. The existing literature in this field has only considered political experience as an adjunct to occupational experience, and has not systematically studied whether pre-parliamentary experience of the political or occupational kind affects post-election career attainment. In this thesis I have built on this literature by focusing firstly on the ways in which political experience, considered as a stand-alone category, can affect political careers, and secondly, by utilising original empirical data to link pre-election political experience and post-election parliamentary career paths. Centring on the focal research questions of ‘what is the impact of pre-parliamentary political experience on political careers in the UK parliament’ and whether all experience has the same effect, in this conclusion I will restate the findings of the thesis, breaking these down into empirical findings, theoretical and conceptual contributions, and practical policy implications. Following this, I will turn to recommendations for future research whilst recognising the limitations of this study, prior to summarising the chapter, and thesis, at the end.

The empirical contribution of the thesis

The empirical findings of the thesis can be broken down into two parts. Firstly, and in answer to the focal research question of the thesis, it has been shown that pre-parliamentary political experience does have an effect on political careers in the UK parliament at Westminster, and this is demonstrated across both chapter four and chapter five. Chapter four utilised regression analyses to highlight the effect relative to other variables, and it was demonstrated that although other factors had larger effects on career trajectories, pre-parliamentary political experience did have an effect on career path.

Secondly, it has also been shown in chapters four and five that different types of political experience result in differential career path outcomes for MPs. That is, not all pre-parliamentary political experience has the same effect. Those MPs who hold pre-parliamentary political experience gained at the local political level, primarily as a local councillor but also as a local party organiser, for example, were more likely to remain

backbenchers or be promoted to lesser frontbench office than their colleagues whose pre-parliamentary political experience was gained at the national level, for example working for an MP, being a special adviser to a leading politician, or working in the head office of a political party. These individuals were significantly more likely to attain cabinet-level frontbench positions, as well as other roles which lay higher in the hierarchy of parliamentary positions outlined in chapter three. Chapter five demonstrated that different types of political experience interacted with other effects, such as age at time of election, to produce differential career outcomes. These findings are both original contributions to the literature, building on existing work by demonstrating the differential effects of different types of political experience, and by showing that pre-election experience affects post-election career trajectory.

The theoretical contribution of the thesis

The conceptual work of the thesis takes place in chapters two and three, and is revisited and developed further in chapter six, which considers how the concepts that are empirically applied to the British case in chapters four and five could hold wider relevance for international comparative work.

Earlier work by Cairney (2007), amongst others, classifies pre-parliamentary experience in two ways; brokerage roles, which are conducive to the pursuit of a political career, and instrumental roles that have a direct link to politics. This work is based on the idea that certain occupations would provide individuals with more of the resources required to run for parliament, including flexible career paths, high levels of remuneration and other more abstract skills such as public speaking experience and so on (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Cairney's brokerage-instrumental classification includes various types of political experience in the single instrumental category, including being a local councillor and working for an MP (2007). This thesis has challenged these conceptual formations of pre-parliamentary experience in two ways.

Firstly, this thesis has made the case that political experience should be considered as a stand-alone category rather than being subsumed into occupational classifications. This is in part due to the fact that much political experience is gained in addition to a further full-time occupation pursued by an aspirant MP. For example, Tony Blair was involved for a time in the local politics of the London Labour party, but throughout his

occupation was as a lawyer. Thus, by focusing on occupation, and subsuming political experience into this classification, this existing framework was only measuring a small amount of the political experience of MPs, primarily full-time paid political roles. Secondly, this existing classification tacitly assumes that all types of pre-parliamentary political experience are the same, by including them all in a homogenous 'instrumental' category. Again, this thesis has challenged this by delineating between various types of political experience which lie broadly along a split between experience gained on the local level and experience gained on the national level. This distinction is elucidated in chapters two, three, and six, with the latter arguing that such a split would have relevance to both individual case studies of countries other than Britain as well as comparative studies.

In these ways, the thesis makes a conceptual contribution to the existing literature by developing it, as well as raising the possibility of using these concepts in future work. Not only do the conceptual contributions increase the accuracy of the existing frameworks, they increase their scope, allowing for future comparisons of the relative influence of occupation and political experience. The empirical findings support the conceptual contentions made within the thesis, and as such, should inform future work in this area. In many ways, the thesis supports the findings of existing work by itself finding that pre-parliamentary experience is indeed something worth studying, but furthermore it develops this work, conceptually and empirically.

The wider implications of the thesis

The thesis holds wider implications for other work and policy, both within the academy and beyond. The practical and policy implications lie in the areas of candidate selection for political parties and in the process of frontbench promotions. The model of supply and demand, outlined in chapter one, suggests that certain groups of society are more or less likely to hold political office (or various other offices) for reasons of either supply, i.e. there is not enough of said group standing for office, or demand, whereby the gatekeepers of that office do not want to select them (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). In reality, these dynamics often operate in the form of a feedback loop, where supply and demand closely influence each other. In other words, if a lot of members of a group are involved in politics, they may seek to bring in others like them (a demand-side bias), whilst individuals who are not in that group may see politics as something

that is not for people like them (thus in turn creating a supply-side bias). As knowledge of these dynamics grows, interventions can be made which shift them, correcting any bias which favours certain groups over others. Perhaps the most notable example of such an intervention is that of sex quotas, now used widely across the globe (Krook 2010). The original findings of this thesis could also be used as the basis for a similar intervention, though this time at the parliamentary level when selecting individuals for frontbench promotion. Although unlikely to result in any sort of quota in the short-term, the findings could cause politicians and those interested in politics more broadly to pause for thought, and to consider more carefully whether the concentration of political power in the hands of those with similar political experiences is either desirable or healthy.

Furthermore, it raises questions regarding the selection of those with local council experience for parliamentary elections. If this number continues to fall, as would seem to be the case based on available longitudinal data, will the patterns identified within this thesis be compounded in years to come?

In terms of academic work, the thesis taps into wider concerns relating to public engagement with politics, which in turn have been linked to changes in the structure, membership, and purpose of political parties (Scarrow, Webb, and Farrell 2001; Jun 2003; Mair 2006; Webb 2009). The British population dislike their politicians. In fact, they consistently rank them as their least favourite and least trusted of all the professions - in 2011, polling firm IPSOS Mori found that only 14% of Britons would trust politicians to tell the truth. For context, this figure stands at 55% for the ordinary man or woman in the street, 34% for trade union officials, 74% for professors, and an unparalleled 88% for doctors. The only group who came close to being as untrustworthy as politicians were journalists, with just 19% of the public finding them trustworthy.

Beyond the British case, a large number of authors identify symptoms of political disengagement on a widespread scale across advanced Western democracies (Norris 1999; Mair 2006; Stoker 2006; Hay 2007; Flinders 2012). Measuring this disengagement, these authors focus on tumbling electoral turnouts, falling levels of party membership, discontent with politics as reflected in opinion polling, and

additionally identify a broad malaise surrounding modern politics in advanced democracies.³² Flinders notes that “politics’, for the many rather than just a few, has become a dirty word conjuring up notions of sleaze, corruption, greed, and inefficiency’ (2012, p.vii).

Colin Hay (2007), Gerry Stoker (2006), and Matthew Flinders (2012), amongst others (such as Norris 1999), seek explanation for the trends they have identified. Broadly, explanations (which could also be colloquially referred to as ‘blame’) tend to focus on either the electorate, who are turning away from politics, or the political system and politicians, presumably a (or the) cause of this turn. Hay identifies these as arguments of demand and supply, respectively, and notes that much of the literature places the emphasis on demand-side explanations which focus on the shortcomings of, or changes in, the electorate which are mooted to have led to the disaffection that is the status quo (2007, p.158).³³

The explanations for this broad disenchantment that these authors do differ, but all can be characterised as defences of politics (Flinders even includes this phrase in the title of his work, echoing Bernard Crick’s 1962 work, *In Defence of Politics*). That is, they are generally of the opinion that politics is good, and the levels of attack that it is currently under are disproportionate to any wrong for which it may be culpable.³⁴ For Stoker, politics is constructed in such a way that criticism is, to a large extent, inevitable, with a slightly naïve electorate expecting too much and therefore never being satiated by what comes to pass as a result of any political activity they do participate in (2006, pp.82-83). Additionally, he sees the fact that politics is conducted by a small group of individuals, and then reported to the public in a way that belittles any potential achievements and ‘commentary that can enlighten, but more often confuses’; as a result, ‘the average citizen is alienated from politics and far from convinced of its value’

³² A full summary of this diagnosis is available in Hay (2007), Chapter One ‘Political Disenchantment’, or in Mair’s ‘Hollowing Out’ (2006) article.

³³ Hay goes on to problematize this distinction in his concluding remarks, stating that it is ‘a little too simple and a little too neat’ and that in reality, the situation is more complex (2007, p159-160).

³⁴ Arguably, this is hardly a surprise considering that these are books written by political scientists, a section of society inevitably more invested in politics than most.

(Stoker 2006, p.202). Stoker and Flinders are both keen to emphasise that politics can't solve every problem that living in a democratic society presents, and that people need to be more realistic about what politics, and politicians, can achieve (Stoker 2006, chapter four; Flinders 2012, chapter two).

Hay lays the blame for disaffection more squarely at the door of neo-liberal economic thinking, to a greater extent than either Stoker or Flinders (Hay 2007, pp.97-99). Negative perceptions are causing the current crisis of participation in politics, but these negative perceptions are both projected onto politicians by a cynical electorate in addition to being projected onto themselves by an increasingly enfeebled set of politicians who perceive their own agency as being sapped by assumptions of public choice theory and globalisation (Hay 2007, p.158). He writes that 'the contemporary condition of political disaffection and disengagement is perhaps better seen as the result of an unfortunate series of cumulative, mutually reinforcing, yet largely unintended consequences, in which public choice theoretical assumptions have undoubtedly played a crucial role' (Hay 2007, p.158).

Recognition for the influence of the activity of political parties on this situation is notable by its absence – Flinders, Hay, and Stoker all note that depoliticisation, the process by which politicians hand off powers they previously held to supposedly independent bodies, has weakened the hand of political actors, but none of the authors find politicians particularly culpable for the situation politics finds itself in (Stoker 2006, pp.204-205; Hay 2007, chapters three and four; Flinders 2012, chapter three). However, parties have changed over time, in structure and function, and this is surely going to have an effect on the ways in which individuals engage with political life (Katz and Mair 1995; Krouwel 2006; Mair 2006). Peter Mair writes;

Previously, and probably through to at least the 1970s, conventional politics was seen to belong to the citizen, and something in which the citizen could, and often did, participate. Now, it has become part of an external world which people watch from outside: a world of political leaders, separate from that of the citizenry. It is the

transformation of party democracy into 'audience democracy' (2006, p44).

The professionalisation of political activism, noted by Stoker in particular (2006, chapter six), is a clear pre-cursor to the patterns identified in this thesis, with more and more individuals involved in politics in a professional capacity prior to becoming elected politicians. This would seem to be intensifying as the overall number of people engaged with politics is falling, as evidenced by the authors mentioned above. As was noted in chapters one and two, political parties are the gatekeepers of political office, effectively screening who becomes a national-level politician and who does not. Have the patterns identified in this thesis, the concentration of specific groups of political involved individuals in the top offices of state, compounded disenchantment with politics?

Realistically, this is unlikely to be the case, and to suggest that it is would be hasty. However, arguably this thesis has shown that political parties are increasingly selecting, and promoting, their own to the heights of British politics; it would appear to be the case that getting to the top of political life from the outside, having started on the local level, is more difficult than if you are already integrated into that national-level political culture. This occurs as part of processes that parties themselves control, from candidate selection, training, outreach, and so on, and then the party leadership who control intra-parliamentary promotional patterns.

To return to the model of supply and demand in the context of the findings of this thesis, parties can control both the supply of candidates with certain types of political experience as well as the demand for this experience at various stages of a political career. Making no normative judgement above and beyond the contention made in the introduction that a concentration of power in the hands of a group based on any single characteristic is undesirable, political parties could nonetheless change the processes outlined in the thesis to ensure that this concentration does not become a permanent fixture of British political life.

In terms of normative judgements, a further question is how, or if, these patterns link to theories of representation, at a time of record political disenchantment. Taking the

cue from Paul Webb (2009), who asks whether the failings of political parties in modern Britain are real or imagined, it can be asked whether the proliferation of politicians with national-level professionalised political backgrounds, and their subsequent concentration in high political office, affects the representative relationship between the public and their politicians? Understanding the issues of representation that stem from the rise of professional politicians utilising traditional accounts is difficult. In the past, accounts of representation were delineated along the lines of trustee and delegate, amongst others, underpinned by the notion that there were secure interests of the represented that could be known by the representative. This notion carried over into modern accounts, which focused more on 'presence', their argument developed to posit that not only should the interests of historically disadvantaged groups be represented politically, but that they should be represented by individuals from those groups (Phillips 1998). This work continued to consider the interests of these groups as definitively knowable. When talking of the substantive representation of women (SRW), at least until relatively recently, feminist scholars would often consider women's interests to be fairly transparent, certainly in areas considered to be naturally gendered such as abortion rights.

Such existing frameworks which focus on representation as both the descriptive representation and substantive representation of groups do not map easily onto the concern present here, that of professional politicians. Firstly, they do not dominate the legislature, even if the impression given is otherwise³⁵, and in any case it is also hard to claim that non-professional politicians are a historically underrepresented group who require presence in the legislature to right previous wrongs. Additionally, it is not entirely clear that there would be obvious collective interests on either side. There is perhaps potential to argue that professional politicians are in some way predominantly a single social class, but even in this case, it is likely going to prove hard to separate such a class out from that seen in the rest of the legislature – as a norm, political

³⁵ An interesting question here relates to the distinction of legislature and government. For example, would it be acceptable to have a representative legislature but not a representative government? Such questions require further untangling that there is simply not space to do justice to here.

legislatures in the modern era have been dominated by the middle class.³⁶ As such, it is hard to construct this question (of whether there is a representative issues related to the over/under representation of groups and interests caused by professional politicians) in a traditionally recognisable way.

This leads to the question of whether or not this is actually a unique problem that we are dealing with here? It has been argued that all representatives are by definition unrepresentative (Voet 1992). At base level the one characteristic held by all elected representatives is that their interest in politics is sufficient enough to cause them to run for office – because representatives are not chosen by lot. This comes ahead of characteristics like sex, ethnicity or class amongst others. This is a catch-22, because of course such an interest in politics is a necessary condition of them becoming a representative. Thus, it is the unbridgeable gap between the politicians and the public, and professional politicians are arguably the very embodiment of it. Rather than being a new ‘crisis’ of representation, it is perhaps instead the case that professional politicians simply serve to highlight this already existing divide – by virtue of the extremity of their involvement with politics, they draw out what was already there, the gap reflected in both their own presence as well as the unhappiness of the public.

Is such a divide inevitable, given the practice and nature of modern political life? Professional politicians do not break democratic criteria in a formal sense. For example, they face election; they have to act within the law, and so on. To quote David Plotke, ‘the opposite of representation is not participation. The opposite of representation is exclusion. And the opposite of participation is abstention’ (1997, p19). Urbinati adds that, ‘participation is not an alternative to representation. It is a way to check that representation is working’ (Landemore 2007). However, as this thesis has demonstrated, participation is something limited by various social resources, and differs along the lines of various personal characteristics. Whether or not the patterns this thesis identifies will simply reinforce these disparities is something that should be of interest, and perhaps concern, to political scientists.

Limitations of the thesis and recommendations for future research

³⁶ It is worth noting that the opposite of a professional politician is not a working class politician, however defined.

The limitations of this thesis are threefold, and are in many ways by-products of the methodological approach adopted throughout. First, the thesis focuses on a specific time period, naturally precluding analysis of a broader political era. Centring its attention on the period 1997-2010, and specifically on those MPs elected at the 1997 general election, the analysis inevitably excludes those MPs who do not fall under these criteria. Second, certain elements of parliamentary careers were excluded from the analysis for both practical and theoretical reasons, the result of which is that the thesis focuses primarily on frontbench careers rather than the tentatively developing backbench career path. Thirdly, the thesis is a single-country case study and as such offers no comparative purchase.

Future research, whilst drawing on the empirical and conceptual contributions of the thesis as discussed above, can develop these limitations. Most obviously, future work can utilise a similar cohort approach which looks, for example, at those MPs elected at the general elections of 2001, 2005, and so on. Such an approach will provide the opportunity to assess whether the effects seen in this thesis are individual to the cohort, or indeed are common across multiple samples. Longitudinal analysis of an extended time period could also occur, in addition to studies of individual governments, prime ministers, and so on. In short, such an approach would result in multiple opportunities for future research and analysis in the field of political careers.

This work, in the British case, could also incorporate measures of backbench career progression, most notably the development of select committees as a genuine venue for backbench activity (Benton and Russell 2012). Including variables in the analysis which account for such activity could shed further light on the divide between those MPs with local and national political backgrounds as highlighted in this thesis. Additionally, it raises questions regarding the idea of a 'stalled career'. As discussed in chapter five, the parliamentary careers of some individuals never take off despite the odds stacked in their favour. Similarly, what of the permanent backbencher who chooses such a career path? Future research should consider these issues in greater detail.

The conceptual contribution of the thesis, stated most explicitly in chapter six, could be utilised in future comparative work which assesses the political experience of

legislators in various countries and across various political systems. The distinctions made between national- and local-level political experience, partisan and non-partisan experience, and between elected and non-elected experience, could be applied to work on both parliamentary and presidential political systems, and can elucidate existing work which looks at inter-institutional movement across multi-level political systems, looking not only at inter-institutional movement, but also at intra-institutional career progression (Borchert and Stolz 2011). Chapter six, in particular, provides a conceptual framework which could be applied to multiple international cases with little adaptation required.

Conclusion

Building on a literature which holds an interest in the social and personal backgrounds of British parliamentarians, in this thesis I have developed this work by arguing for a more detailed focus on political experience. I have argued that the existing literature considered this as an extension of occupation, and subsumed multiple types of political experience into falsely homogeneous categories. Instead, I have distinguished broadly between pre-parliamentary political experience gained on the local level, for example as a local councillor, and that gained on the national level, such as working for an MP or in the head office of a political party. This distinction has been operationalised empirically and tested on original longitudinal data which details the political careers of those MPs elected for the first time at the 1997 election, collected by the author. Empirically, I have demonstrated that pre-parliamentary political experience does affect career trajectories in the House of Commons, with MPs who have political experience gained on the national level more likely to enter parliament at a younger age, and be promoted faster and into positions which act as more effective springboards to higher office than their colleagues whose political experience is on the local level. The development of this distinction of different types of political experience as a stand-alone classification is an original contribution to scholarly knowledge. The extension of this distinction to comparative work has been discussed, and a conceptual framework provided. In this thesis I have contributed to knowledge in the field of political careers, and have done so in a way that makes these developments easy to implement into future scholarship in this area.

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